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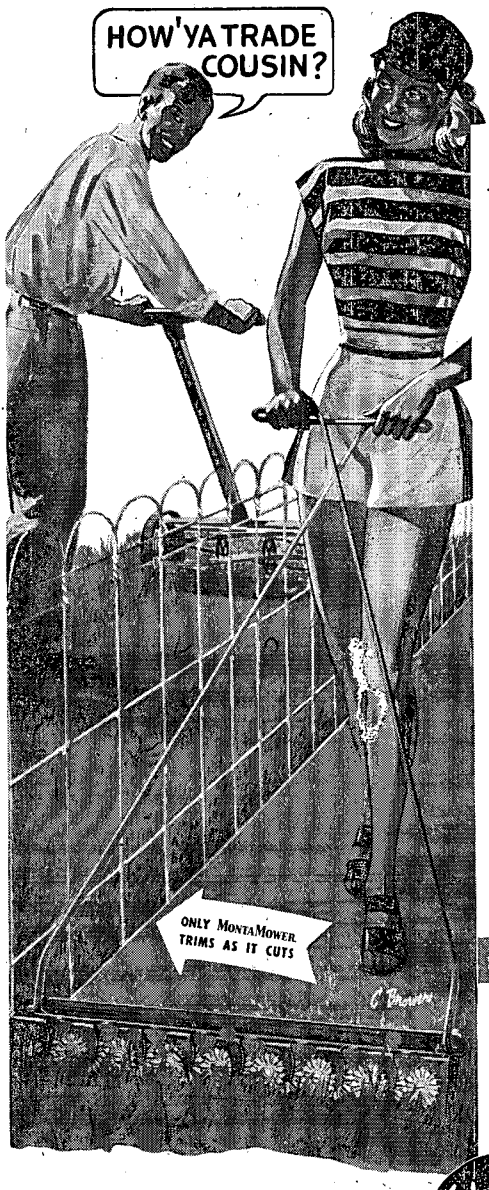

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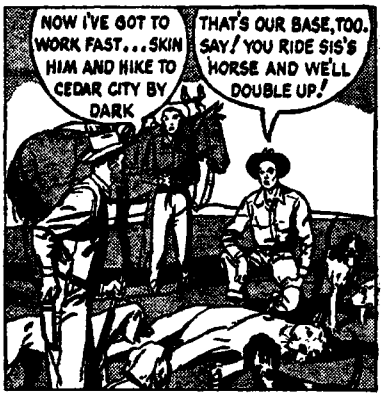

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Novel

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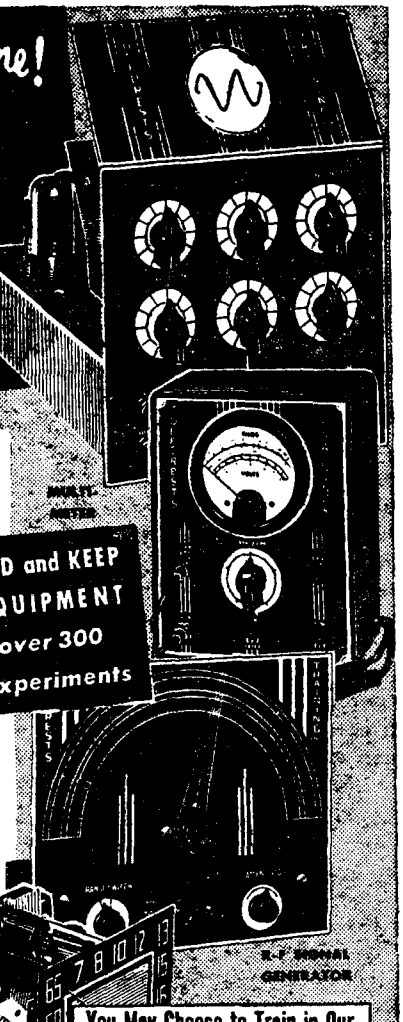

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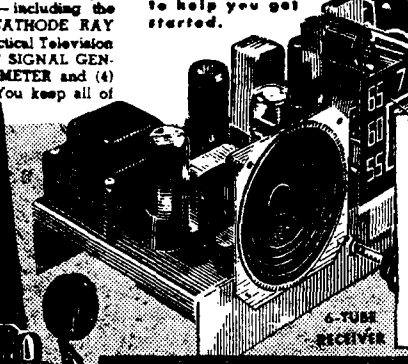

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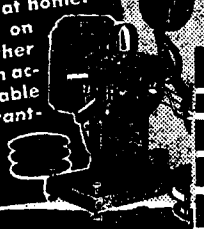

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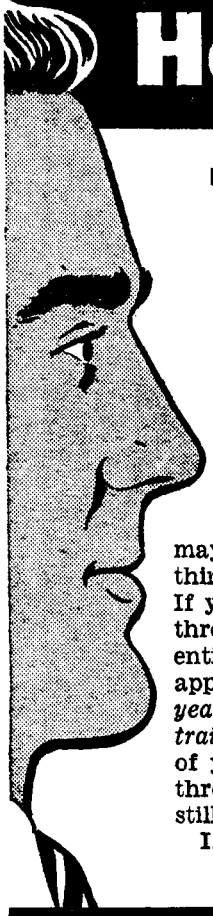

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CHAPTER I

INTO ENDLESS NIGHT

PROBABLY no man or woman in the planet of Venus thought the Hunter expedition other than the mad scheme of one driven daft by too much study.

I count it final proof of my devotion to my lifelong friend that I found myself on the way to join his little band of skeptical but inseparable companions about to start on that epoch-making voyage. Not one of us, I believe, really expected to return alive. For, indeed, in all the known history of Venus none had ever ventured into that great circle of endless darkness beyond the seas and come back to tell the story.

I had started from my bachelor apartment well before sailing time, having sent

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By Garret Smith

The surface of the sea now sparkled and danced amid a flashing of myriad hues. . . .

●

my luggage on ahead, deciding to walk to the dock, that I might have a final season of intimate and leisurely communion with the familiar scenes in which I had passed my life.

But in this I was disappointed. The street into which I stepped forth was strangely unfamiliar. True, the setting was unchanged. There was the same broad, palm-lined avenue with the grand canal at its center. Up and down busily plied as usual the swift, duck-shaped street-boats, their drab-tunicked motormen struggling sturdily at the driving levers.

Nor had the buildings suffered change. Not a dwelling in all that thoroughfare had been altered within my lifetime, nor, for that matter, within the memories of my parents and grandparents.

The big, five-storied pyramid I had just left, as near like all its fellows as so many grains of sand, had been the home of my family for a hundred generations. My great-great-grandfather had built the final story in which were the quarters I occupied. It had henceforth sufficed as it stood for our branch of the clan.

Overhead hung the same, eternally unchanging, gray sky, shedding its unvarying, diffuse light. The mellow air, as always, moved gently from west to east, now and then dropping momentarily its load of life-giving moisture in the form of a fine, misty shower.

But it was the number and manner of the people in the street that changed this familiar scene into one of grotesque strangeness.

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I do not remember ever before having seen our usually placid populace in such uproar. All the concourse bordering the grand canal on the way to the harbor was thronged with excited people, men and women, old and young, all discussing one subject and all bent on one errand, to get as near as might be to that strange ship which lay at the head of the main pier.

Indeed all Venus was athrill with the news that had been flashed from signal-tower to signal-tower unto the uttermost corners of the Land of Light. It was not the mere fact that a scholar had ventured the theory that there were other habitable lands than ours beyond the Circle of Darkness. That would have been dismissed with contemptuous shrugs.

But that such a revolutionary notion should be held by the popular son and heir of the Chief Patriarch, and that he should stake his life in an attempt to prove it was cause for universal excitement! It marked an epoch in the history of a race accustomed to the passage of one monotonous age after another without event more notable than the occasional long-expected death of a Chief Patriarch.

Some two hundred steps on, where the dwellings gave way to the low, two-storied shops of the market-place, the crowd became congested to a point where progress was difficult. I mounted near-by steps, the better to survey the strange spectacle.

The entire market square was already filled with milling heads, and four other streets were momentarily adding to the mass. I was looking out over a turbulent sea of flaxen hair, the monotony of coloring broken only as here and there a more restless individual pushed way through the throng, exposing briefly the white flash of a woman's tunic or the darker drab of masculine garb.

All eyes were turned expectantly toward the great pyramid across the square, the home of the Chief Patriarch and the official capitol of Venus. I guessed at once the meaning of this attention. Such of the people as had been unable to find place on the dock where Hunter's ship lay, sought to catch a glimpse of him as he left his father's house. That they had in prospect even more exciting possibilities I learned presently from fragments of speech tossed up from the crowd near me.

"I'm with the Patriarch, for one. Why should we let this go on?" shouted an elderly woman.

"Hush, mother!" cautioned her son at her elbow. "Don't start trouble"

"I believe the Patriarch would wink at it if we stopped the young man at his door," came the voice of another.

"The insanity of our ancestors back among us—"

"Should not be allowed—"

"Ideas proved absurd ages ago—"

"The son of a Patriarch—no right to throw himself away—who would succeed this chief?"

THESE and other bits of excited talk filled me with misgivings. Was the throng bent on force to prevent Hunter's journey? Such a thing as a popular demonstration, particularly a resort to violence, had been unheard of in many ages. Yet incendiary talk like this was equally unknown. I knew well the Chief Patriarch had little sympathy with his son's venture. I could not conceive, however, that he should so far fly in the face of the custom of Venus as to use stronger measures than persuasion.

"Here comes Weaver, back from the dock. Perhaps he has news," called a young man near me. "Oh, Weaver! Has Hunter's ship sailed yet?"

"Not yet, nor will it for some time," replied a sturdy, middle-aged man who was struggling through the press. "Hunter and his party are not yet aboard."

"We are in time, then!" exclaimed the questioner.

"In time for what?" demanded the other.

"To prevent the sailing. It is reported the Patriarch has forbidden his son to go, and we are here to help him carry out his wish."

"Forbid, did you say?" inquired the elder man sarcastically. "Who on Venus has power to forbid anyone to do anything? One would think, young man, that you came from some strange world beyond the Circle of Darkness of which our Hunter dreams. Forbid, indeed! Better for Venus that all the sons of all the Patriarchs and the Patriarchs themselves go bury themselves in the darkness than that for one moment one man assume to rule over another!"

"All well enough among sane men," retorted the youth, "but do you believe this son of the Patriarch sane? True, we supposed we had for many ages banished sickness of mind and body from Venus, but what do you make of this?"

"I make no more than do you, and like it no better. Hunter is committing grave error, all our scholars say, but we cannot

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count him truly insane, though his error be a mad one. Of course it has been agreed through all ages that this Land of Light is the only world, at least the only world in which man can live. We know nothing about the great Circle of Darkness around it except that it is cold past all endurance and that there is never light there to guide the way if man could endure the cold. None but children believe the fables of monsters dwelling there.

"Now, all that being so, and no man knowing anything contrary, how shall you or I call a man crazy who talks of lands beyond the darkness? He may be right; who can say? To try to cross the darkness is madness. I grant that. But I love the man with daring to attempt it, and I agree to no step to hinder him."

From the murmurs of approval within hearing of his voice, I judged that this opinion met with considerable favor. There were, however, enough dark looks from others to show that public sentiment was rather evenly divided.

At that moment a shout in the direction of the Patriarch's house again drew every eye that way. The great main door was slowly rising.

A moment later the venerable Patriarch came forth alone, and stood with hand upraised for silence. The vast throng responded on the instant and waited respectfully for their leader to speak.

The Chief Patriarch was then in the seventh period of his life, but his tall, commanding figure was still unbent and his movements vigorous. Only his hair, which hung below his shoulders and had long since turned from flaxen to pure white, indicated his age. His voice though gentle and sympathetic, rang out clearly to the far side of the square:

"Fellow citizens," he said, "I appreciate your show of devotion. Word has come to me that you stand ready to help me restrain my son from this adventure, which, to you, seems madness. I beg to remind you, however, that restraint is a thing unknown among us. In all Venus there is no man or group of men, no power, that would dare to exercise restraint toward any being.

"I call upon you to remember the event which ushered in our modern era, from which we reckon all time, the overthrow of the only power that ever sought to impose authority, laws, force, and all their attendant evils upon the people of Venus.

"Ever since, we have known no law but custom, no authority but public opinion, no force but persuasion. That custom has placed me, your Chief Patriarch, among you as counselor and guide, not as ruler. I would then be repeating the error of that power which we overthrew two hundred ages ago did I, with your assistance, try to impose the false authority of force upon my own son.

"But, though you know that I cannot agree with my son in this venture of his, and that I am torn with grief at the thought that he may be going to an untimely death, I would not have you misjudge him. This is no madcap escapade of a restless youth driven by mere love of adventure. However mistaken he may be, I believe—and would have you believe—that he is moved by an unselfish devotion to your welfare and the welfare of the children that shall come after you.

"We have all for some time realized that our continent, this great Land of Light, the only known habitable land, is becoming overcrowded. Time was when it held open fields and forests. It is now one vast city. Our gardens no longer supply enough food. We have perforce turned to the laboratory for sustenance. Where shall the race turn next? We look up and see only a canopy of unsubstantial mist. There is no promise of other worlds there, and if there were, we have not the wings of birds with which to seek them. We look off from our shores over the seas in every direction only to be met by the unfathomed ring of eternal night and deadly cold.

"No man has ever crossed that Circle of Darkness. No man can say what lies beyond. My son believes he can cross it and find fair lands on the other side. Let us put down our private beliefs as to his unwisdom and honor his courage and the self-sacrifice of his brave companions, and bid him good-speed. And may the Great Over Spirit, Father of us all, be with him and them."

Overcome with emotion, the old Patriarch ceased speaking, stood for a moment searching the faces of the throng and, with head still proudly erect, turned and withdrew within his dwelling.

The crowd hesitated for a moment, then, without a word, began to disperse.

I watched them thoughtfully. The eloquence of the Patriarch had swayed them for the moment. But as I considered what had occurred and what had been said and the significance of it all, I was suddenly seized with a feeling almost prophetic, a conviction that I had been witnessing the germinating of the seeds of disruption of

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this slumbrous, custom-ruled, changeless land of ours, seeds that had lain dormant for two hundred ages.

THE more I reflected on this nearly revolutionary demonstration by the people in the market-place, the more I was convinced that it was in part, at least, the result of the baleful influence of the First Lady of the South, whom I had interviewed shortly before. The revolutionary ideas of that remarkable woman had bade fair to be a public sensation had not their announcement been followed so closely by the more spectacular proposal of Hunter.

She was the daughter of the Patriarch of South Venus, head of the chief family of the ancient clan of Masons.

The people of Venus were divided into clans according to their original occupations, and all the families of each clan bore the name of its particular calling. Hence the Masons were the families forming the group or clan of those whose ancestors had worked at the building of walls.

Of course these family names, as I give them here, are by no means the same in sound as they were spoken in the tongue of Venus. In setting this record down I have been forced to translate even our proper names, as far as possible, according to sense, into their equivalent English words.

For so utterly alien to you is our speech that not one word of it can be expressed in Earth characters or pronounced in any Earth tongue.

Some thirty sleep-periods before the time set for the departure of Hunter's expedition, and while his plans were yet secret, there had been signaled through to Central Venus the report that this Mme. Mason, who, through her position and personal ability, had become known as the First Lady of the South, had been whispering about among her friends a most revolutionary proposal.

It was said that she declared for defiance of the ancient, unbroken custom of Venus by seeking in marriage a mate from another clan than her own, a thing that had never been tolerated in Venus as far back as recorded history or even tradition goes.

I remember how amazed I was later when I first learned that in this topsy-turvy Earth of yours, you not only allowed but encouraged the practice, to us so repulsive, of mating a man and woman not related by blood or the ties of a clan, nay, that, on the other hand, you rather discouraged the marriage of relatives, a practice so common among us.

So serious was the suggesting of this hitherto unheard-of thing by so influential a woman that I determined not to record the rumor in our *Chronicle* until I had it first-hand from the lady herself.

You may well understand how important I considered this interview when I tell you that I disliked travel exceedingly, and that the distance to South Venus was a little over twenty sleeps, or about two thousand of your Earth miles.

In Venus a "sleep" was not only our unit of time but of distance as well. Despite our lack of a natural time-unit, such as furnished by your Earth day and night, custom had established with us a uniform, periodical time of sleeping. From the beginning of one sleep-period to the beginning of the next, we called a "sleep", as you call your time-unit a day. Likewise, our ancients hit upon their average journey in a sleep-period as a measure of distance, just as your primitive tribes measured distance by a day's journey.

But in our modern times, with our swift motor-driven canal barges being our sole means of overland travel in Venus, we were able to make at least two sleeps of distance in one sleep of time. So in the course of ten sleeps I arrived in South Venus and secured quarters at the leading travelers' home.

When I think of the perils and hardships of the appalling pilgrimages I have undergone since, over black, uncharted lands and seas and through empty spaces, I smile at the to-do I made over this brief journey.

But I was accustomed to the privacy of my roomy quarters and the freedom of the streets, and I chafed under the restraint of the narrow cabin and the enforced company of my traveling companions. Those who occupied adjacent sections and hence were most thrust upon me proved uncongenial and tiresome.

There was an elderly woman, an engineer who had charge of the upkeep of one of the southern sections of the canal systems; a young woman who acted as buyer of raw materials for a big chemical concern in Central Venus, and a middle-aged man, manager of a line of ships plying around the coast from South Venus to the Western Islands.

No sooner did this worthy trio learn that I was editor of the *Chronicle* than they began vying with each other to get my ear

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and pour into that suffering organ innumerable dull details of their several affairs, aiming, no doubt, to impress me sufficiently with their importance to get mention before the public. To my death, I shall positively loathe the subjects of canals, chemistry, and shipping.

But, aside from the wearisomeness of my company and my eagerness to get at the nub of my errand, the journey had been most tiresome, in that it was entirely lacking in new interest. Though I had not made this trip before since my early youth, when I had taken it with my father, the landscape had not altered a whit.

There was the same endlessly flat country as far as the eye could reach, traversed by its network of straight, narrow canals, through which we made our way. Along either bank was the same unbroken succession of pyramidal buildings, all alike, whether dwelling or business buildings, save that around each dwelling was the usual small garden patch which did its part toward supplying food and vegetable fabrics. Nor were there any of the variations of customs and dress among the people, such as I have found since lend constant interest to an earthly journey.

So it came about that I arrived in South Venus wearied and out of temper and in no proper frame of mind to interview so exalted a personage. But my impatience to have done with my errand and be upon my homeward way prevented my first seeking rest and a more equable mood.

Then, as I was about to set out for the Mason dwelling, there came over the signal-towers the astounding news of my friend Hunter's proposal to traverse the Circle of Darkness, and the purpose of my visit was at once thrust into the background.

I was therefore ushered into the presence of the Lady of the South with mind greatly distraught with my new tidings, little dreaming that any connection existed between Hunter's mad purpose and the mad ideas of my hostess.

I WAS ushered into the Patriarchal residence by one of the young women of the Mason clan, who was fulfilling her customary term of household service, such as fell to the lot of all youths of Venus. She was a shy maiden who greeted me politely enough, but there was about her an air of suppressed excitement, which I noted also in all those I met in the passages of the great house on my way to the apartments of her I sought.

As usual with the younger generations of a family, the lady occupied an apartment in the apex story of the pyramid, hence I had good opportunity to observe many of the tenants of the building as I passed up the several inclines and along the thrifty roof gardens growing on each terrace.

I could not believe that the perturbation I noticed on every countenance was due to the fact that I was a stranger. For the household of a Patriarch must of necessity be accustomed to the frequent going and coming of strangers seeking advice of its head.

It was while I waited in an anteroom of the Lady's apartment for my guide to make known my presence and the object of my visit that I learned the cause of this general excitement, and became convinced that the report I had received of my hostess's opinions was no mere idle rumor.

There came to my ear after a moment excited voices in an inner chamber, a man and woman in heated argument. They were evidently so overwrought that they were heedless of the fact that I could not help but overhear every word.

"I beg of you, my daughter," pleaded the man, "do not further disgrace us. All our household is terribly distressed already by this report of your foolish ideas."

"You have no right to say I have disgraced you," objected the woman. "Truth is no disgrace."

By this I knew I was an unwilling listener to a dispute between the Lady and her father, the Patriarch. The voice of the Lady was resolute and impassioned, but low-pitched and musical. Prejudiced as I was against the speaker, I could not but be swayed by its charm.

"See this man, if you must; I can't prevent it, of course," continued the Patriarch, "but I plead with you for the last time to give up your horrible notions. Tell him that you were not serious, that you have no such ideas. Truth you call them? They are damnable errors!"

"Nonsense!" was the retort. "It is time we changed our ideas in Venus. We boast we have no laws, but we are slaves of tyrant custom. I will see this man and tell him the truth as I see it, and tell him to spread it through all Venus. The women will heed me. Some have already done so. I shall lose no chance to spread the truth."

"My child, you force me to be sorry that you are a daughter of mine. Wait—"

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He was interrupted by an impatient exclamation. There was a quick, light step. The draperies were thrust aside, and the Lady of the South stood before me.

Despite the impression her voice had made, I had still expected to see a commanding figure, a stern-faced, wild-eyed creature. On the contrary, I beheld the very incarnation of the voice I had heard. A slight, softly rounded form was revealed beneath a clinging silken robe that draped her to the feet instead of stopping at the knees like the conventional, uniform tunic of both men and women of Venus. Nor was this robe of the regulation white, but shimmered with a blending of soft colors.

She was a little under the average height. Her hair, a shade darker than the usual flaxen, instead of falling loose to the shoulders, as was customary, had been let grow and had been braided and coiled about her shapely little head.

The face betrayed not a hint of the sternness I had expected. To this day I have difficulty in recalling its features distinctly. I was conscious then only of a radiant smile that held me fascinated and for the moment bewitched. I could only stare helplessly into her wistful gray eyes, all the brave catechism I had prepared wiped out of my mind.

I recognized her at once as a new and strange type in Venus, where our women had, as a class, little to distinguish them in appearance either mentally or physically from the men with whom they had worked side by side during all our history on a basis of perfect equality.

It was my first experience with a glamorous woman—something which at the time I did not attempt to analyze, but which I realized later was due in a large part to the consciously arranged effect of her unusual method of dress.

I was scandalized even while I was fascinated. It had never occurred before to the women of Venus that they should make themselves attractive, nor had our men been in the habit of considering such a superficial element in choosing wives. I have learned that you, of Earth, had deified our planet as the goddess of romantic love between the sexes. But I assure you that you were wide of the actual truth. Such a thing as romantic love had never been dreamed of in Venus until introduced by the First Lady of the South. We knew only the affection developed after marriage, which, with us, was purely an affair of convenience.

The Lady gracefully dropped on a rug near the one on which I reclined, and waited for me to speak.

So I pulled myself together and in embarrassed, halting fashion, told her of the report that had reached us in Central Venus and of my desire to learn the real truth from her.

"I am glad to give it to you," she responded. "I simply believe that marriage and the rearing of children is woman's chief work and that she should be left free to do that work. As it is, we must, according to custom, earn our living and leave the care and education of our children to the old people who have retired from other work."

"Do you mean that women should do no work except the care of their homes and children?" I asked.

"I do."

"Who then would support these women?" I demanded incredulously.

"Who indeed but their husbands, the fathers of their children?"

"Can you imagine any man willing to bear such an unreasonable burden, or any able-bodied woman whose pride would allow her to live in idleness on the proceeds of another's labor? How do you propose to make men support women?"

"By not marrying unless we first love the man we marry and he loves us. If a man really loves a woman and can marry her only on those terms, he will submit."

Love before marriage! I had never heard of such a thing. It struck me as a thing improper even to speak of.

"I know what I am talking of," he went on, "because I have loved a man myself and I have never been wed. This is why I believe in marriage with those out of one's clan. Love cannot be controlled. It goes where it will. There should be no marriage without love. So when love comes, marriage should follow, whatever our old custom says. I shall preach this until our women are free. They shall not suffer as I have suffered. I love a man not of my clan. I have asked him to brave custom and marry me, and he has refused. Yet I believe he loves me."

She was growing excited, and, needless to say, I was becoming greatly embarrassed at this intimate revelation. I hastily cast about in a panic for a change of subject, and recalled the news of Hunter's proposed expedition.

Mumbling some awkward words of sympathy for her distress, I added that I, too, had been greatly disturbed by news from a dear friend.

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Then I told her briefly of Hunter's determination to explore the Circle of Darkness.

The effect of my words was most astonishing.

She leaped to her feet, her face torn with frenzied horror.

"He shall not go! He shall not go! I will stop him! I must not lose him like that! I cannot live without him!"

She dashed from the room, and I did not see her again.

Our Hunter, then, was being wooed by this mad lady! But I returned home convinced that it was the embarrassing proposal of the Lady of the South that had much to do with Hunter's determination to explore unknown seas. And in the popular move to prevent him, I saw evidence that the Lady's influence over the people was far-reaching.

TO MY dying breath I shall never forget my sensations as I stood by Hunter's side on the deck of his great ship and watched the light fade away, perhaps never again to shine for us. Ahead, and ever drawing nearer, was that grim, unknown, nether region of eternal darkness in which, if our purpose held, we were soon to be engulfed.

Consider what this meant to us who, in all our lives, had never known darkness, excepting when, for amusement or experiment, we had each probably at some time or other covered the windows of a room and enjoyed for a few moments the thrilling novelty of being unable to see.

To us eternal light, unvarying even for a moment from one age-end to another, was as much a matter of course as the air we breathed or the moisture it shed upon us, or the genial, unchanging glow of heat that pervaded it. Whence came that mysterious light and heat we knew no more than we understood the source of that inexhaustible stream of air that poured unvaryingly across our land, or of the endless supply of moisture that fed our soil from above. And our scientists, who delved deeply into the mysteries of chemistry and biology, were as much at a loss over these more familiar mysteries as were we of lesser minds.

And yet, unexplainable as was the presence of light and heat, their absence was still more incomprehensible. Nevertheless, reputable explorers who had ventured to the very margin of the Circle of Darkness had returned with undoubted proof of such lack.

Within the present age a distant cousin of Hunter's had sailed his ship so far into the twilight that bordered the Circle of Darkness that his terrified crew had looked ahead into what seemed a jet-black, impenetrable wall scarce a ship's length in front of them. That it was no solid wall they knew when a great mountain of crystal floated out of the darkness and directly toward them. Only maneuvering the vessel averted wreck. As it was, a jagged corner of the mass grazed their hull, a fragment breaking off and falling on the deck. Those who, gathered curiously about this bit of crystal, laid hands upon it, were seized with sharp pain in the palms.

When they sought to bring this crystal back as a memento, it shortly turned to a pool of water on the deck—a great marvel to all who saw it, no one having ever witnessed the like before

But, stranger yet, the water in a bucket on the deck had turned to this same hard, clear crystal, only to become water again on their return to the warm seas.

Meantime the air about them had changed to malignant vapor that seemed to cut them to their very bones. Some there were whose ears and fingers were smitten as with a leprosy, swelling and turning white and giving great pain.

Such evidence as this was in accord with tales told by their earlier explorers. This earlier Hunter had sailed away on a later voyage, and neither ship nor crew had ever again been heard of.

Now, as I sought to project my imagination and prepare myself in some measure for this unthinkable experience, it balked in the attempt. Of what Hunter's plan might be for coping with these awful negations of nature, I had as yet no knowledge. Having been away in the south when he planned his expedition, I knew nothing of its details until my return home just before his departure. He had sent for me, briefly outlined his purpose, and asked me to join him. There had been no time for further details.

I had agreed to his proposal on the spur of the moment, partly through devotion to him, and partly because, as editor of the *Central Chronicle*, of Venus, I could not afford to let pass the one great news-event of my lifetime.

Nevertheless, Hunter had seen to it that any of his company who turned faint-hearted when confronted with the grim actuality might have chance to turn back. We were accompanied on the first stage of our trip by a convoy ship on which any

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of us who chose might return to safety at the last moment. Hunter had expressly stipulated in my case that I should feel no embarrassment in so doing, inasmuch as I had started without full explanation of his plans.

Now that we were drawing near the point where our convoy would leave us, I had sought out Hunter, to ask him for the further details he had promised.

"Very well, Scribner," he said, "if you'll come down to my cabin I'll explain why I'm undertaking this thing, and you can decide finally whether you are with me to the finish."

Hunter's cabin had more the appearance of a combination of study and laboratory than the sleeping-room of a ship's commander. Only his sleeping-pad, now hanging to air by one of the octagonal windows, suggested the room's latter character. There was a well-filled case of enscrolled tablets, all on scientific subjects, records of former explorations, I noted from the titles. Another case contained a mixed assortment of nautical and chemical instruments. On the walls were numerous maps.

The center of the cabin was occupied by an ordinary hemisphere, on its surface a map of the Land of Light which we were leaving. The base of the hemisphere, as usual, shaded off into the black band that represented the Circle of Darkness.

Such was our conception at that time of the planet on which we lived, we who had no knowledge of other planets than our own, or ever dreamed that they existed beyond the eternal cloud-blanket of our sky.

You who were born on Earth, our then unknown sister planet, and have all your lives looked out through a clear atmosphere upon the blazing sun of your days and the moon and stars of your nights, can hardly imagine a world like ours, where there were no days or nights, a world, one-half of which dwelt in eternal light and the other in eternal darkness. And yet your astronomers had discovered that such is the case with us. Venus, unlike your Earth, does not spin about on its axis, giving every part of its surface a constant change from light to darkness and back. It presents, forever, the same face toward the sun.

Now, had Venus enjoyed a clear atmosphere like that of Earth, we would, like you, have been familiar with other heavenly bodies, and have developed astronomers who would have taught us the truth about our own planet. For we are a race of scientists, many of whom have in certain fields far outstripped those of Earth. But your astronomers, I have learned, have also shown you that Venus has a constantly cloudy atmosphere. Never in the recorded history of Venus has the sun appeared to us through the gray mantle of our heavens, and never up to the time when this tale begins had anyone dreamed of the existence of such a body.

In view of these handicaps, then, I protest that you of the Earth should have charity for our ignorance. Particularly should this be in view of the fact that but a few ages ago you of one hemisphere of the Earth were as ignorant of the other hemisphere as were we of the Land of Light of the other half of our planet. I have learned of your Columbus, who, like our Hunter, believed in another land beyond the seas, and in the face of a scoffing world wagered his life on his faith.

But your Columbus had reasons for the faith that was in him, reasons based on scientific facts that are now commonplaces to the veriest child. As Hunter stood over his charts and explained to me his faith, I was forced to confess that he had no shadow of logical evidence, nor to this day have I been able to fathom the basis of his belief. It is still to me little less than intuition.

LIKE all my fellow-beings in Venus, I believed firmly in the Over Spirit of the Air, Creator of all things, the same, I am convinced, as He Whom you Earth-born call God. But I have always been one of those advanced thinkers who doubted the popular belief that the Over Spirit breathed into the minds of our Patriarchs rare bits of unprovable wisdom that were not granted to the mass of us. Yet, as I look back, I am near to believing that this son of our Chief Patriarch had partaken in a measure of this divine gift.

To be sure, the truth came to him in a strangely distorted vision, which he unfolded to me, bending over his charts there in the ship's cabin.

"This," said he, placing his hand on the hemisphere, "is our present idea of the universe. I believe we are right as to the shape of our Land of Light. Our mathematicians have proved it is a symmetrically rounded hill like this.

"But why should we believed this is the only hill rising out of the zone of darkness? I believe the universe is a great sea of air of infinite extent. Only the upper

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layers of the air have the mysterious properties of light, warmth, and moisture. Hence only those lands which, like ours, rise up as islands above the stratum of darkness enjoy the life-giving properties.

"But, call it pure theory, mere fantasy, as you will, I cannot believe that in all limitless space the Over Spirit has created only one little island like ours, and then allowed it to be overpeopled. There must be other lands rising above the darkness and put there for us to find. I believe I am the one appointed to find them."

He turned from the model and paced the floor excitedly, carried away by the fervor of his great dream. His tall, powerful frame quivered, and his strong face glowed with intensity.

"I tell you," he went on, as though addressing a great multitude, "the time is ripe for change. Our race is rotting with monotony. New worlds must be opened for it to conquer, new difficulties found for it to overcome, new problems presented for it to solve, new customs thrust upon it to waken its sleeping soul."

He paused and seemed again to realize my presence. He seized me by the shoulders and searched my face eagerly.

"Scribner, have you never felt it? Am I the only man in Venus who has sickened of the changeless life we lead?"

I had till then been a bit bewildered by his tirade. But now as his burning eyes bored into mine, I suddenly felt an answering thrill. There flashed over me new realization of a great void in my life, a void so familiar that it had never before dawned on my consciousness.

Change! That was the magic word. A word little used among us because the thing for which it stood had no place in our lives. I realized in the same instant what was that haunting, elusive sense of something impending that had caught me as I watched the throng in the marketplace. The same hunger for that change that had burnt into consciousness in Hunter's vibrant soul and been communicated by him to me was seething in the subconsciousness of the multitude and drawing dangerously near the surface. It needed but a little urge and touch of mass excitement to cause it to break out as a great contagion, mass psychology in explosion. Hence the general tumult at Hunter's going.

Hunter, then, sought to avert the cataclysm he had foreseen by providing a safety valve in the form of new worlds to conquer.

Sharply as I had been struck by the revelation of the changelessness of our world and with hunger for change, it was at the moment mainly an emotional revelation. I had no standard of comparison to give me an intellectual grasp of what I meant by change. But now, after over three of your years on your ever-changing Earth, I can give you, my readers, some conception of the situation.

Our monotony was founded in nature. I have said we had no days or nights. We had no months or years, for no glimpse of heavenly bodies gave us such measure of time. Your hours and minutes did not exist. Time flowed in an unmarked stream, broken into periods only by the lengths of our lives.

Likewise, we had no change of climate, for Venus does not lean on its axis toward the plane of its orbit as does your Earth.

We lived on one great continent. No mountain ridges or intruding seas broke us into groups. So we had but one race, one language, one religion, one set of customs, that had not altered since the last corner of our land had been settled.

And the consciousness of this monotony had suddenly burst upon me, though I had as yet no experience of its opposite.

I wrenched myself from Hunter's grasp and seized both his hands in mine.

"Hunter!" I cried. "You're right, and I'm with you to the end! I know now what I have hungered for all my life and what all Venus pines for, unknowing, in its soul. Change! Adventure! Surprise!

"Don't tell me more of your plans. I'll follow where you lead. For once, let me have an experience which I cannot foresee!"

And I knew that he understood. Without another word, we returned to the deck.

All my dread of the darkness had vanished. I was looking forward with the eagerness of a child to our departure from the Land of Never Change.

CHAPTER II

A VOICE FROM THE DARK

IT WAS a tense moment aboard the great vessel. Our little company of thirty seemed strangely alone as we stood grouped on the deck straining our eyes toward the spot where the convoy, the last link with our former life, was fading from sight in the thickening murk. At moments the heavy vapors rolled up and shut her from sight. Then through a rift we

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would catch some glimpses of her again.

Ghastly stillness reigned, startlingly shattered at intervals by the melancholy boom of the convoy's gong, tolling in the gloom like a funeral knell to life and light and all we held dear. The ship's motor was still. She lay motionless on the black, stagnant flood. Even the heavy, biting air had ceased its eternal movement.

It was as though the Spirit of Darkness had paused aghast at this impious intrusion while it considered what dire punishment to enforce on these imprudent mortals.

I dare say that not one of us, as we stood huddled together, shivering in our strange new garbs of heavy fabric, but what suffered an instant of half repentance of our rash purpose.

Soon the convoy was altogether blotted from sight. The throb of the gong came fainter to our ears, its mellowing resonance sounding more than ever a note of despair. The darkness steadily closed in around us. It became a blank wall a few paces from our gunwales, then it mounted our very rails. A few moments, and we gasped in unison as the black wall closed down altogether. It was as though the eyes had been plucked from our heads. I reached out involuntarily and touched my neighbor to make sure that I was not alone in the black void.

I felt a stir of panic among my companions, an echo of the tumult in my own soul.

At that critical point there came from the motor-cabin the calm, confident voice of Hunter.

"Don't be alarmed," he assured us. "We will have light, plenty of it, in a moment. It will startle you when it comes, so be prepared."

It was here that our leader put our faith in him to the supreme test. I briefly regretted that I had not, after all, insisted on a full disclosure of the method he had in mind for coping with the darkness. Manifestly no progress could be made without the aid of eyesight. I recalled the ancient tales of great mountains of crystal floating out of the blackness to crush such a puny object as a man-made ship, of seas that turned solid so that no floating thing could force its way through.

Did he mean that he had no conquering device, after all, and, confronted with the actual condition of darkness, had at once seen the hopelessness of advancing? Was he about to turn back to the light he had just left and abandon the expedition? The clang of the convoy's gong was still faintly audible. We could get our bearings from it, and return to safety. I was guilty of the hope that such was his purpose.

Or could he be obsessed with the idea that the Circle of Darkness was only a narrow zone through which we could drift in a few brief moments into a new realm of light?

But even as we struggled with these doubts we were answered in most amazing fashion. The darkness was snatched from our vacant eyeballs by a great glare such as none of us had ever before experienced. So intense was its brilliance that it paralyzed our optic nerves. After the first sense of sheer whiteness we were left for an instant blind again.

When our eyes became accustomed to this sudden change so that we could see again, we found ourselves bathed by radiance brighter than we had ever before known. Every detail of our bird-shaped vessel stood out in clear-cut distinctness. The great wings which extended half folded along either side, a unique feature of Hunter's ship, to my mind then a useless decoration, shone as though of silver.

The decks, the rounded cabin roofs, the short spars, and the high prow which terminated in the figure of a water-fowl's neck and head, all gleamed in the same way. This effect, I noted in passing, was produced by the glare reflected from a thin sheeting of icy crystal that had coated the whole vessel since we entered the cold zone.

Far out over the water the illumination extended, ending only where it was dissipated in the white shifting fog-banks. The surface of the sea, revealed at last sight as a lifeless floor of blackness, now sparkled and danced amid a flashing of myriad hues.

We were aroused from our stupor of astonishment by the voice of Hunter:

"What do you think of it? Didn't I promise you light?"

There was in his voice and manner the triumph of a small boy who has played a smart trick on his elders.

For a moment more we stared, still uncomprehending. Then it dawned on us.

For the first time, a mortal of Venus had produced light!

To you, my Earth readers, this must be almost incomprehensible. It will be hard for you to understand a race that had never in its history known fire or artificial light, except as we had now and then seen an accidental manifestation of

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it, for which we had not any possible use.

The races of Earth, I am told, began using fire before the dawn of civilization, indeed much of your civilization developed from that use. To-day your boasted progress woud vanish in a night if fire were removed from Earth.

But remember, necessity is the mother of invention, as one of your sages has said. You had need of fire to warm you in your winters. Hence you learned to use it. So your dark nights demanded the light that went with fire.

We had no winter and no night. So why should we concern ourselves with fire? And in our world there were few of the accidental manifestations of natural fire, no volcanoes, no electrical storms, no conflagrations resulting from accident from the use of fire, as with you.

WHEN it came to mechanical inventions, not even then had we missed the use of artificial heat. You being familiar with fire and learning its power, had from it developed the steam engine and later the electric dynamo.

We, starting from a different viewpoint, had developed much earlier than you a knowledge of chemistry. We had for instance from the earliest recorded ages prepared our food by chemical process instead of fire cooking as with you. In developing artificial power we had invented crude chemical motors at first, later discovering a method of developing high power electricity chemically and applying it to the driving of powerful machinery, a thing which you have as yet seen only a glimmering of in what you call your galvanic batteries.

But now, driven by need, Hunter had invented artificial light. Faced with his voyage into eternal darkness, he had bethought himself of the occasional dull flashes and glows he had noted while experimenting with chemical apparatus. Seeking their cause, he now devised glass globes filled with a compound which when excited by electricity produced this brilliance.

He pointed out to us now some of these globes set on each point of the vessel, on the crest of the figurehead, at the top of the spars, and in rows on the cabin-roofs. We had noted these globes before only as ornaments without use and commented on Hunter's vain love of decoration.

Each cabin also was equipped with one of these globes, giving the interior of the ship heat as well as light.

"This is really the first time I have had darkness to test the lights!" Hunter exclaimed. "I haven't felt confident of the success of our venture until now. I think we can dismiss the convoy and be on our way."

He entered the motor-cabin and sounded three sharp rings of the gong, the signal agreed upon with the convoy's captain. Faintly over the water came the answer in kind.

Then he pulled a control bolt. The motors underneath him began to throb. The great webbed feet at the vessel's side swept out and began churning the water. A moment more, and we were gliding gracefully into the unknown.

Gradually we became accustomed to our strange surroundings and our fears wore away, to be replaced again by the thrill of high adventure. The new light, once explained, gave us a sense of confidence we had not felt before since the voyage was proposed. We were in high spirits.

True, we were already experiencing a foretaste of hardship in the extreme cold which searched and stung our untried bodies despite our heavy robes. Hunter made the watches short, and the members of each watch were glad to escape to the warm cabin for respite when the time marker in the motor-cabin pointed to the end of their trick.

So five watches passed with little incident, save that now and then our ship crunched through a field of thin ice crystal or was occasionally bumped by jagged blocks of that material. To this we soon became accustomed but were ever sharply on the lookout lest we crash into one of the reported crystal mountains that might come upon us suddenly from the fog-banks.

It was in the sixth watch, which chanced to be mine, that we first sighted one of these towering monsters off to our right, just within the range of our light, an awesome spectacle to our unaccustomed eyes. From then on we saw many of them. We ran at reduced speed, barely creeping at times The crystal fields were becoming more frequent and more difficult to break through. The cold grew more intense.

It was in this watch that a curious excitement occurred. Up to this point we had seen no sign of animal life in the chill, dead water or in the scarcely less dead and chill air.

Now, near the end of my watch, we heard discordant cries in the air behind us which we soon recognized as those of

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water-fowls. Presently we were overtaken by a flock of some dozen of these birds, flying low and making to pass us close to the left.

To our surprise they paid not the slightest attention to the glare of our lights, which we supposed would have terrified them.

They had nearly passed us when one flying in the rear drove head on against the light at the summit of the ship's figure-head and fell back, stunned on the deck.

The forward watch picked it up and examined it curiously. After a moment he cried out in surprise and studied more closely the bird's head.

"Look!" he cried. "The creature has no eyes!"

And it was true. We each examined the bird carefully, but could discover nothing but two faint scars where eyes should have been.

There were indeed monsters in this strange world, forms of life that found their way about in the blackness without need of sight, and born without organs with which to see. For nature evidently wasted no unnecessary equipment on her creatures.

One of us dropped the uncanny thing overboard with a shudder. Trivial, in a way, as was the incident, it left us with an uneasy feeling not readily shaken off.

But we had little time to dwell upon this horror. A cry from the steersman called our attention back to our surroundings. While we had been examining the bird we were entering an apparently broad passage between two crystal fields. Now we saw that these fields had converged until they met just ahead of us. We were in a pocket.

Weaver, chief of the watch, gave orders to the steersman to back out and seek some other passage. But on attempting to do so we found, to our consternation, that quantities of drifting crystal blocks and sheets had floated in behind and threatened to imprison us. Moreover, the driving-feet crashed and ground against these impediments and were momentarily in danger of being broken.

In this crisis Weaver ordered the motor stopped and summoned Hunter from his sleep for consultation.

Hunter had just come on deck and was taking in the situation when a sound off across the crystal field to the right held us all at attention. It was a hoarse cry, low-pitched but penetrating.

My first thought was that it was some strange animal denizen of the darkness. We listened for a moment. Again it came, this time with unmistakable distinctness.

It was a human voice!

WE STARED at each other, amazed. How could there possibly be human beings out there in the wastes of endless night and cold?

And yet human beings there were, and no small number of them. For now the call was repeated and answered by another and another at different points. Then in still another quarter beyond the range of our powerful lights arose shouts. It was as if several persons were conversing excitedly.

We were too far off to catch the words, yet words of human speech they were, and the speakers were rapidly drawing nearer.

Those of our company off watch, aroused by the tumult, leaped from their sleeping pads and rushed to the deck. We stood at the rail, gripped with bewildered fear. Hunter himself was as much at loss as the rest, though if he felt any considerable degree of the terror that held us, his calm self-control concealed it.

Suddenly with a cry of mixed relief and alarm he whirled from the rail toward the motor-cabin

"I have it!" he shouted. "Those must be the men of our convoy. They have drifted back into the shadow and have been lost. Probably had trouble with their motors. I'll ring our gong so they'll know who we are."

But at that another sound drowned the human outcry and held even our leader motionless with horror.

It began in a low-pitched, thunderous growl that rattled the cabin windows. It rose to a rasping roar and ended in an ear-piercing, wailing shriek.

Then out upon the lighted area of the ice-field staggered a great, shaggy, four-footed beast. To my excited eyes the creature measured no less than ten paces from his frothing jaws to his lashing tail. Our lights gleamed on a double row of hideous fangs and on formidable hooked claws that tore at the ice with each awkward leap. I was ready now to give full credit to the nursery tales of monsters with which in my childhood I had been regaled by my granddame.

As he neared the center of the lighted area, his pace slackened and presently, with another awful outcry, he swayed and sank to the ice and lay twitching as if in agony.

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We could see protruding from his left side just back of the shoulder, a short lance, round which oozed a slow stream of blood. He had been struck by a human huntsman. As this last cry reechoed over the frozen fields there stole out of the shadows behind the great beast a half circle of some fifty human forms. They were creeping cautiously forward and closing around their wounded prey.

They moved in absolute silence now, but there could be no doubt that these were the beings we had heard shouting in the distance. Nor did it take more than the first glance to convince us all that here were no sailors from our convoy, nor any men of the Venus we had known.

I have called them human. In that I flattered them grossly. They walked upright and, to be sure, had human forms. Moreover, the creatures wore man-made clothing.

But it was such clothing as none of us had ever before seen, fashioned rudely of shaggy fur, following the shape of their bodies throughout, so that they looked not unlike lesser copies of the great beast that sprawled before them.

But their faces sent cold shivers of horror down our spines. They were darker in complexion than those of normal man, and heavy, protruding jaws gave them a peculiarly beastly appearance. But even at this distance there was an indefinable lack of all expression. Nor were they the expressionless faces of beasts, but the blank countenances of dead men, of peculiarly brutal dead men who had died from some foul disease that had horribly disfigured and discolored their features. It was as though we were watching grotesque automatons silently closing in on the dying beast. Each fur-covered hand held a spear such as we had seen in the animal's side.

And not one of these strange figures, to our great surprise, had as yet taken the slightest notice of our brilliantly lighted ship, though such a spectacle had certainly never before invaded the haunts of these sons of the night.

As the deadly circle closed in, the wounded quarry staggered up, and with a roar dashed forward. He was received on vicious spear-points and recoiled, snarling. A second lance now quivered in his right side.

In a frenzy he whirled about the circle. Now a frantic sweep of a terrible hook-tipped claw caught two of the hunters unawares, and they went down under it. With a gasping snarl the great jaws snapped once at each prostrate throat and the two victims moved no more.

But this moment of partial triumph was the beast's final undoing. While he was thus preoccupied the circle closed in and lance after lance struck home. With a last cry of pain he sank to the ice, twitched convulsively, and was still.

THERE followed a scene of brutal savagery such as I had never before dreamed possible among human beings. Remember, no savage race had survived in the Land of Light, and the savage period of our own race's history ceased before the beginning of any records save the vaguest of discredited traditions. There was in our knowledge no precedent for murderous savagery.

The instant they were satisfied that danger from the man-killing claws had passed, there was a rush for the carcass. The next instant they were madly fighting each other for the booty. The circle of allies had resolved into a mound of screaming, squirming, thrusting, fur-clad foes.

Now and then a luckless one recoiled from the mass and fell on the ice, dead or sorely wounded from a spear-thrust. Several times a contending pair separated from the main group and fought an exchange of wild lance-thrusts until one or the other fell. The victor paused long enough to strip the fur garment from the fallen adversary and fasten it around his own waist as a trophy.

But gradually the fighting ceased as one by one the savages got what they fought for, a part of the beast's carcass. Each successful one retired with his booty to a little distance, and, squatting on their haunches, began eating a chunk of the raw flesh, tearing it greedily with his teeth, a process you can well imagine was a nauseating one to us fastidious vegetarians watching from the ship. I know I was sick with mingled horror and fear.

"They're human beings, no doubt," said Hunter in a rather shaky voice at my elbow, "but they are of very low intelligence. They seem to have only the instinct to kill and feed. They are too stupid even to notice us so far. We must get out of here before they do take notice. We have no weapons, and know nothing of fighting. They'd slaughter every man of us for our clothing."

He rushed into the cabin to start the ship's motor. I saw at once that there was little chance of our extricating ourselves

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in a hurry from the pocket into which we had drifted just before our attention had been diverted by the savages. One side of the vessel was now crowded firmly against the margin of the very ice-field on which the savages held their ghastly feast. All about her were quantities of floating pieces of ice that were every moment wedging more tightly into our narrow, blind channel, and already beginning to freeze together into a solid sheet.

We were in a critical position. I doubted not that these strangely nonchalant savages had noted at a distance, even before we saw them, that we could not escape and intended to ignore us until they had eaten their fill. In no other way could I explain their strange indifference to our presence. After the exhibition we had just witnessed, what possible mercy could we expect from them?

With our very lives staked on the ship's response to her driving feet, we waited breathlessly for the first sound of the motor.

It came, and the powerful feet churned and ground at the ice. Our gaze was bent over the rail upon the channel's margin in hope of some sign of progress. But none came. Instead, after a moment there was a crash within the bowels of the ship and the motor stopped altogether. The strain of fighting the ice had proven too much, and one of the main shafts had finally parted.

We lay absolutely at the mercy of the savages. And at the same instant it seemed evident that the quality of their mercy was to put to the test.

For just as the motor broke down they seemed suddenly aroused by the sounds from our vessel and taking note of our presence for the first time. As one man, they dropped their filthy food, seized their spears, and leaped to their feet. For a moment they stood tensely silent, as if listening.

Then one gave a low cry, as of direction. They turned our way and in grim silence began advancing upon us with set spears, as we had seen them but a little time ago closing in on the doomed beast.

We watched them in hypnotized horror while they advanced a matter of twenty paces, those dead men's faces becoming every instant more distinct and more gruesome.

And then we realized all at once what had lent the crowning horror to those faces.

Not one of them had eyes!

INSTINCTIVELY our ship's company drew around Hunter in desperate, wordless hope that somehow he had foreseen this peril and was prepared to save us from these eyeless and ruthless fiends.

But for once our leader seemed without foreknowledge and without inspiration. While that uncanny semicircle of blind murderers advanced another twenty paces, he stood clutching the rail, studying the hideous faces as if in those blank masks he might find an answer to his problem.

"If I had only a little time!" he groaned. "I should have been prepared for this!"

An age it seemed to us before we saw his eyes light with a flash of hope.

"We'll try the gong," he whispered. "It may scare them off. If I can gain a little time, we will be safe."

He stepped swiftly into the motor-cabin, turned on the electric gong-control, and the harsh, melancholy clamor tore the air.

It seemed for a moment that this might have the desired effect. At the first clang of the heavy hammer the oncoming horde recoiled as if from a blow in their sightless faces. A few turned to flee, but stopped some paces back and stood, heads bent toward us as though concentrating their sense of hearing in an effort to analyze the strange tumult.

But evidently creatures who so recklessly faced violent death in search of food and in haphazard quarrels over its possession were not to be greatly dismayed at mere clamor, however unfamiliar.

Again the guttural order from one of their members who seemed to be a leader. The line stiffened at once. The half-fearful ones returned to their places. The slow, silent and relentless advance against our devoted company was resumed. However they might fly at each other's throats in dividing prey once won, they evidently acted in concert while stalking it.

At that our nerves snapped. Panic seized us. Our only thought was flight, we knew not where, or much cared. The darkness of the open ice-fields seemed for the moment a welcome refuge.

But the side of the ship away from the savages, over which we would have instinctively fled, lay next to the channel whose surface of loose ice offered no footing. As it was, many of our company would have leaped blindly into this freezing flood and perished had not some few of the cooler heads among us recovered a little self-possession in time to realize this danger and herded them over the opposite rail.

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There was still a considerable open space left between us and the fast advancing foe, and there was time to slip around the end of the blind line, if we did not betray ourselves to their marvelously acute sense of hearing, which seemed largely to replace sight. We counted on the noise of the gong to cover our movements.

Weaver and I were among the last to leave. We realized simultaneously that Hunter was still in the cabin, probably unconscious of the fact that his company were deserting the ship. We called to him frantically, and getting no answer, rushed in after him.

He was working calmly but quickly over his motor controls.

"Come!" I shouted. "They're almost on us! The rest have gone!"

"Gone! Where?" he demanded.

"Out on the ice. We've just time. Come!"

"Call them back! Call them back!" he ordered excitedly. "I'll have the ship out in another moment."

But our taut nerves would brook no further dallying. We seized him between us without ceremony and, despite his indignant protests, dragged him bodily over the ship's side.

He thanked us afterward for this show of mutiny, for so little margin of safety remained that we nearly brushed against the vile creatures at the end of the line as we stole trembling out of the closing trap.

Once, our uncertain footing was near to betraying us. Our feet had never before tested this treacherous frozen field, and we made sorry work of our effort to step without sound. Slipping, stumbling, again and again, one or more of us falling prone, we made our way till the last of us had nearly passed beyond immediate danger. Weaver was a pace behind Hunter and myself as we rounded the end of the savage line.

I heard a muffled thud behind me and turned to see Weaver lying full length on his back. His feet had slipped from under him suddenly, and he must have struck full on the back of his head, for he lay as if half stunned.

That fact saved his life. For even as I looked back, one of the blind savages at the end of the line, scarce three paces away, halted abruptly and bent a sensitive ear toward the spot where Weaver had fallen. Then, with spear upraised, he felt his way shufflingly over the ice directly

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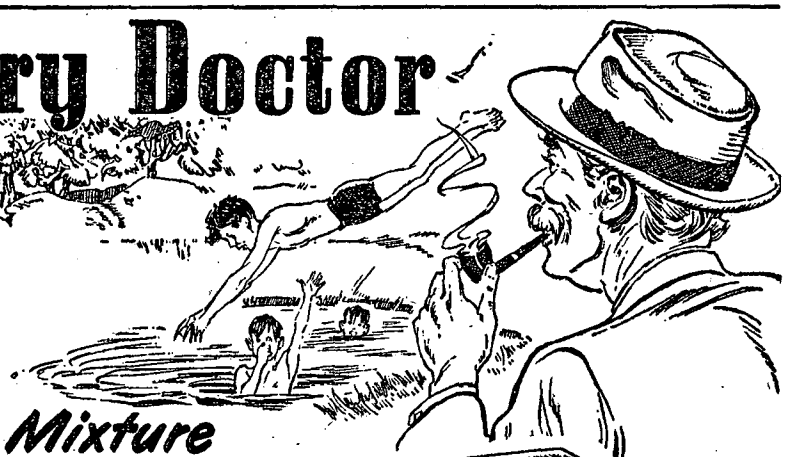

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toward our prostrate companion. The fellow's head was bent forward inquiringly and his thick, brutal nostrils dilated as he sniffed the air like a wild beast. Even in my fright I noted that the sense of smell also aided the hearing in replacing the missing eyesight.

He had almost stepped on Weaver when he halted and drove his spear out with a short, powerful stroke. Had Weaver gained his feet promptly he would have been thrust clean through.

As it was, his daze left him just as the savage struck. He rolled over, and before his assailant could locate him more definitely he had crawled on hands and knees out of his reach.

Again the great gong clanged, and while its reverberations still echoed and re-echoed, we scurried away and halted only when we reached a point where the lights of our ship no longer illuminated the ice sufficiently to make further progress safe.

There we stood, a shuddering, panic-stricken group, waiting breathlessly to see what fate awaited our vessel.

By now the horde had reached it. In the very presence of the booming gong they suffered another fit of trepidation. Presently, however, they regained assurance, and one after another pressing forward, struck the side of the ship and felt it seriously. They thrust their spears at it as though they thought it might be some manner of beast. They poked their noses against it speculatively.

At length, one by chance touched the ladder by which we had made our escape and called excitedly to his fellows. They crowded around him, each feeling of this mysterious affair and discussing it excitedly.

AT length one bold spirit seized hold and cautiously mounted it till he stumbled over the rail on to the deck. Then he shouted volubly to those below, till one after the other the rest followed his example. Presently the whole crew were defiling the vessel with their filthy presence. We could see them prowling about from deck to deck, shouting exictedly at each new discovery.

"I have a scheme," exclaimed Hunter suddenly. "Some of the bodies of those devils may not have been plundered. If so, some of us will put on their clothing, borrow their spears and steal back aboard ship. Then we'll feel like one of them if any of them touch one of us, and those clothes ought to give us the right odor, too. Maybe we can maneuver them below decks, and lock them in. Anyhow, we'll have something to fight with."

In a few moments we had found the spot where the fight had occurred, marked all too plainly by a welter of congealed blood, scattered fragments of the great beast, and the stripped bodies of the slain.

Controlling our squeamishness with an effort, we searched all about, but found only one body that had been overlooked. though there were a number of spears scattered here and there.

Hunter distributed the spears among those of us in whose untried physical prowess he had most confidence, and appropriated the dead savage's furs for himself.

These strange garments he drew on over his own, and announced, to our consternation, that he would go alone aboard the vessel—we amateur spearmen to gather at the foot of the ladder, ready to rush to the rescue if he was beset.

We protested loudly and unanimously against such foolhardiness on his part, declaring that we might better rush the decks in a body, or at least that one of the rest of us should take the risk he proposed shouldering. We pointed out, too, that it would go hard with us should our leader be lost at this critical point. We all but resorted to physical force a second time to restrain him. But he remained firm.

"If we cannot save the ship we are lost, anyhow," he insisted. "I stand the best chance of saving it."

With that he led the way back to the vessel without further argument. With sick hearts we watched him disappear among the motley, wrangling horde.

Moment after moment passed, each seeming an age. At the ladder's foot we stood tensely grasping our unfamiliar weapons and ready to dash into practically hopeless conflict.

Our uneasiness had increased to the point where we could not much longer restrain ourselves when suddenly our attention was diverted in most unexpected and startling fashion.

Somewhere far off to the left, outside the reach of our lights, came a resounding crash. Even as we looked at each other aghast, the ice-field heaved under our feet. A great wave of water tore down the channel amid a roar of grinding ice. Our vessel was torn from its mooring against the ice-field and swept out into mid-channel. The wave overran the ice

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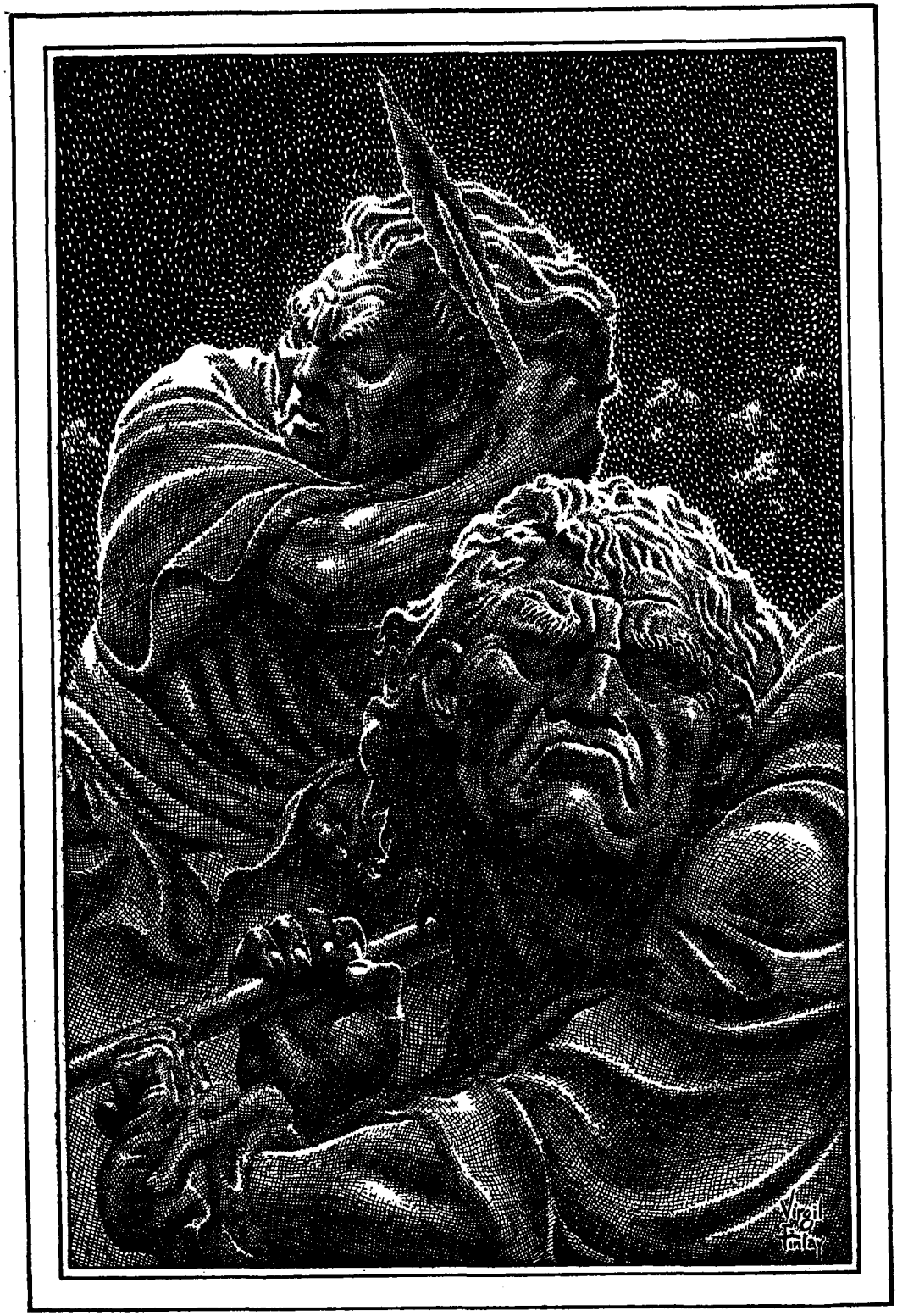

Theirs were the blank countenances of dead men. . . .

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where we stood, drenching us waist deep with its icy flood.

From the direction whence this terrific disturbance started one of those towering ice mountains floated majestically into sight, drifting slowly but relentlessly down the channel, throwing back the ice-field on either side like a powerful flow tossing up soft soil.

Directly in its path lay our crippled vessel and heroic leader.

Powerless now to aid him, we turned and fled from the heaving margin of the channel. We had run perhaps a hundred paces when without an instant's warning the lights of the vessel went out, and the gong ceased ringing. We stopped in our tracks, in the grip of complete despair.

There we were in total darkness on an unstable field of ice in the heart of the region of endless night, without ship and without leader, the unthinkable cold biting our drenched bodies to the bone.

GRADUALLY the thundering and crashing of breaking ice died away. The dizzy heavings of slippery flooring subsided.

Now we stood huddled together in the blackness, listening breathlessly for some sound in the direction of the channel to lend us hope that our ship and its master still survived, but in vain.

Absolute, deathly silence reigned!

The men about me began to stir nervously, to chafe their numbed limbs, as much as anything to break the awful spell of the soundless and sightless world.

Now and then I caught a hushed word, but for the most part we were restrained by the horror of the darkness. We knew not what monstrous thing might be drawn our way by any careless sound.

We were for the moment as helpless as a herd of panic-stricken domestic animals left without keeper.

Presently I heard Weaver murmuring my name and, working around the group, guided by each other's voices, we soon got together and withdrew a little from the rest.

Weaver was a capable seaman and a man of resourcefulness used to directing men. He had joined the expedition as master mariner and first lieutenant to Hunter.

From the first moment I had laid eyes on him during the demonstration in the market-place, he had appealed to me strongly. Ere our ship had been three sleeps on its way, we had become friends.

Now that, with Hunter's removal, the responsibility for the company rested on his shoulders, he naturally turned to me for council. It was not, I must confess, because I was of any real value as an advisor in time of emergency, but because in his perplexity he felt the need of a confidant.

"I'm afraid there is nothing we can do, Scribner, but wait for the end," he admitted. "We have no food or shelter or light, and no chance of getting them. We can't survive long. I am a man of action only. When it comes to carefully worded speech, that is your craft. So I am going to give you the task of breaking to our comrades, as gently as possible, the facts of our situation, and prepare them to face death calmly. They are a brave company, or they would not be here, but their nerves are shaken by what they have just been through, as I confess are mine."

"I am myself certainly in no better frame of mind than the rest," I admitted, "but I'll talk as courageously as possible."

So I got the ear of the company and stated Weaver's conclusions.

"Strange things have happened, however, in this bewildering place, since we entered it," I added in conclusion. "It may be, then, that some miracle may save us. So let's not despair as long as we breathe, but be ready to take advantage of such fortunate chance if it occurs."

This last remark was sheer bravado, and I think it was recognized as such by the comrades.

A murmur of comments followed my speech, then all fell silent again. Even our uneasy movements ceased for the time being.

The biting air hung motionless. Not a sound came out of the darkness.

I, for one, was offering prayer to the Over Spirit, and I knew instinctively that every member of our band was doing likewise.

Presently I was conscious that I had ceased praying and was listening again, my whole soul concentrated in my ears, searching out the uttermost depths of that black, horrible quiet.

It was as though all the universe had been blotted out save one little island of absolute, lifeless cold, to which our lost souls clung for a brief moment, before we, too, merged with the silence and became nothing.

I felt that I must hear some sound from without or lose my reason.

And then it came!

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At first I could not be sure but that it was a trick of my overwrought fancy.

A little back of me, I seemed to hear it, a faint shuffling as of padded feet. My first thought, when I became convinced that I had really heard a sound, was that I was listening to one of our own party moving about, and that I had lost my bearings. For I had not realized that I had turned around while talking to Weaver, and I supposed the rest of our group were directly in front of me, so near that I could reach out and touch them.

I started to turn toward the sound when, somewhere off to the right this time, I heard it again. Then, as I listened in bewilderment, it came from somewhere in front of me, and was immediately repeated off to the left.

"Weaver," I whispered, "did you hear that? Are our men going mad with this, and scattering? Weaver!"

But no answer came from Weaver. I called again a little louder, but again without reply.

Weaver and I had been talking shoulder to shoulder only a moment before, his hand resting on my arm. I had not heard him move away.

Wondering at his failure to reply now, I reached out to touch him, but encountered nothing. Thinking still that I might be confused as to direction, I turned slowly about with hand outstretched. Then I turned in a timid circle, still feeling the empty air.

Again I called in vain.

Now almost beside myself, I took several heedless steps in the direction in which my instinct told me Weaver had last been.

And I collided sharply with another human body. I nearly wept with relief as we clutched each other by the shoulders.

"Is this you, Weaver?" I gasped.

"No, this is Baker," he replied. "Who are you?"

"I'm Scribner. Weaver was at my side an instant ago, and now he's gone."

"Weaver!" I called aloud, throwing all caution aside.

Only a mocking echo answered.

By now I felt the presence of our company about me, and my panic subsided enough for cool thought.

"Is it possible this thing has driven him mad and he has wandered off beyond our reach?" I asked.

"Perhaps the cold has overcome him," suggested a voice in the group. "I feel nearly done for, myself."

"That is possible," I asserted. "He may be lying helpless at our feet."

Then a suggestion flashed into my mind.

"Let's all join hands in a line," I proposed, "so that we cannot be separated, and we will move about in a circle over the ice. I'll stand here in the center as a pivot. If he has fallen, he must be near by, and we will come on him."

THIS scheme we carried out, but though we circled cautiously several times, each time shifting my pivot position so as to cover a new area, we found nothing.

We paused at length, in dismay, and again we listened as though the darkness might perchance betray this new secret.

And again came that soft, shuffling sound here and there around us, now unmistakably outside of our group.

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"Do the rest of you hear anything?" I questioned.

"I do!" came in awed whispers from here and there.

"That must be he!" said one.

"It's someone walking, feeling his way!" declared another.

"He has gone mad and wandered off!" cried a third.

"But!" I exclaimed. "There is more than one thing out there. They are all around us. Who else has gone?"

There was a sudden stir of panic among the men at this suggestion, and a calling of names here and there.

"Tanner, are you there?"

"Is this you, Baker?"

"Where is Carpenter?"

"Just a moment, men!" I called out. "I'll call the roll from memory."

One by one, I recalled and pronounced the names of our original company, with some promptings toward the end of the list when my overwrought mind failed to function readily.

To our horror, six of the group failed to answer.

We stood stunned.

We had become prepared to meet our fate manfully together, but this mysterious separation of our forces again unnerved us.

For a long time we remained thus, the silence broken now and then by someone chafing and thrashing his chilled body, and in between, at intervals, by that soft, insidious shuffling around out on the ice.

"Tanner! Tanner!" cried someone suddenly.

"Tanner is gone! Tanner is gone!" he exclaimed.

This time we were too stunned to react.

"We were standing hand in hand," shouted the man frantically. "He jerked his hand out of mine, and he's gone. Tanner, where—"

The voice broke off suddenly, as though the man had been choked.

"Who was that speaking?" I demanded.

No answer came.

Madness, indeed, was overcoming our company.

From then on I became oblivious to the passage of time. I would beat my arms about me till I felt my sluggish blood stirring again, and then listen till I heard once more those eerie and ominous shuffling sounds.

Then, driven by the need of action, I would circle around the group of shuddering men, feeling my way from shoulder to shoulder with a word of encouragement to each.

As I completed one of those rounds I became convinced that the group had grown smaller since my last round. I groaned hopelessly. No use to warn them again. The madness was evidently seizing them one by one.

I had not the heart to make another round. I could not bear any closer realization of the passing of my brave comrades.

I drew off a pace and, momentarily yielding to a dragging sense of exhaustion, I sank to the ice. It may have been only a moment as I thought then. It may have been much longer that I lay there. I suddenly realized that I was yielding to a leaden drowsiness.

With a supreme effort of the will, I staggered to my feet and shook my body into life again. I must keep moving till my fate overtook me. Was it possible that the madness that had invaded our company had at last found me out?

I determined to make the round of the group once more.

I felt out where I supposed them to be, and touching nothing, took a faltering step forward. Still I touched no one.

I stopped in my tracks and waited for a movement or a word to set me right.

For moments I listened, but heard not the slightest sound. Moreover I was now oppressed by a sensation of being completely alone.

Now, beside myself with fear, I began running frantically, calling first one name then another. All in vain.

At length, completely exhausted, I stopped, faint with absolute despair.

I was alone with this eternal silence!

CHAPTER III

THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

I STRUGGLED against a sense of giddiness, partly due to physical collapse and partly to sheer horror. I swayed and stumbled. Finally, after recovering myself two or three times, my shaking limbs refused longer to sustain me.

I pitched forward, but instead of striking the ice I was caught firmly by a pair of muscular arms and jerked back on my feet.

For an instant I was too surprised to speak. When I did open my mouth to demand the name of my rescuer, I was suddenly half choked by a mass of nauseating, foul-smelling hair thrust into it.

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My hope that one of my companions had been restored to me was short-lived.

While the ironlike arms still clasped me about the chest, binding my own arms to my side, someone else behind me was adjusting the gag, evidently a strip of raw fur, and tying it at the back of my head.

Then another band was passed about my arms. These precautions taken, all without spoken word and with scarcely a sound, the two unseen beings, whatever they were, seized me on either side, and with swift strides, marked only by the soft, shuffling sound that had but now so bewildered our party, began half guiding, half propelling my involuntary footsteps through the blackness.

Instead of being rescued, I was a helpless captive. What fate awaited me I could only imagine, but I strongly suspected it would have been better to perish from cold on the empty ice.

This, then, explained the mysterious vanishing of my companions; a stealthy foe had snatched them one by one out of the midst of our group and borne them away.

Could it be that the blind savages who had boarded our vessel had escaped from it and surrounded us? Or were our captives another group of the same tribe?

We had not proceeded far before I felt a change in the nature of the footing. It was no longer firm and slippery. I seemed to be walking on some soft, yielding substance that crunched crisply under feet. At times I sank into it to my knees and walking became increasingly difficult. I guessed that we had left the sea's frozen surface and were on land.

I also noted an increasing unevenness and change of the level over which we strode. It had been smooth as a floor. Now we frequently went up and down sharp inclines. We stumbled over hummocks. My guides as well as I seemed to find the way difficult, for they proceeded more slowly and at times paused as if studying their bearings.

At each of these pauses my ears, which were with recent practise becoming more and more acute, caught the crunching of an increasing number of footsteps. I heard now occasional guttural shouts or the exchange of words in more conversational key. I realized that my captors had been joined by a considerable number of their kind. I wondered if the rest of our ship's company were with us, gagged and helpless captives like myself.

I became more and more confident that our captors were members of the same blind race of savages who had taken possession of our vessel. The thought of the gruesome and ugly faces of those human beasts as we had seen them under the glare of our ship's lights, and their still uglier actions, made me sick with dread of what might be in store for us.

But as time went on and I came to no harm nor was subjected to any deliberate brutality, I began to take an interest in trying to learn something of these beings. One may well imagine I made little headway at such study when I had nothing by which to go but my memory of a brief glimpse of their faces and such sounds as I heard around me.

I reasoned that this race must have inhabited the realm of eternal darkness from time immemorial. Either the race had originated here and, there being no use for eyes where light was not, it had never developed eyes, or else it was descended from beings like ourselves who had originated in the Land of Light and became lost in the Land of Darkness countless ages ago. Having no further use for eyes, evolution might have gradually eliminated them in the descendants.

After listening closely to their fragmentary speech, I leaned to the latter theory. Every now and then I caught a word that was strikingly similar in sound to one in the language of the Land of Light. I noted too many of these to believe they could be mere coincidences. It indicated a common origin in speech between this race and ours.

But my attention was shortly diverted from speculation back to my own immediate troubles. It was during one of these frequent pauses. There was an unusual amount of talking and movement about me.

After a word or two of apparent command from a third person, I was led to one side by my two captors and faced about. As they brought me to rest I brushed against another person immediately behind me. One of my captors began attaching some sort of tackle to my shoulders.

While he was doing this, I felt a second man in front of me.

Presently, both of my captors left me. I made a tentative move forward, more to test my freedom than with any futile idea of escape. I bumped into the person in front. He immediately dodged away, and as he did so, I felt a forward tugging at the contraption attached to my shoulders.

At the same time there was a slight

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backward pull as though I were attached to something behind me that yielded slightly to the strain.

MY ARMS were still bound down so that I could not feel about with my hands, but a little further twisting of my body convinced me that I was connected by some sort of a harness both with the man in front of me and the man behind me.

A moment later, from off at the side, came a sharp command that unquestionably meant "go" in our tongue. Simultaneously I heard a swishing in the air and felt a stinging blow as of a bit of rope being flayed over my head and shoulders.

I lunged forward in pain. After a moment of strain I felt the tackle give a little, followed by the grinding of some heavy body being dragged over the ground.

Twice more I heard the whip cut the air and fall first on the man behind me and then on the man in front. We were moving forward briskly together now, and the dragging sound behind continued, as did the pull at my shoulders. It dawned on me that I was one of a team of three captives harnessed to some burden which our captors meant to have us drag home for them.

We were not, then, mere captives of these blind men of darkness. We were their slaves.

It was clear now why we had not been summarily killed as I had expected. Our new masters had useful drudgery for us to perform.

Up-hill and down, we labored on. Again and again I would have dropped exhausted had I not been spurred on by the stinging whip and the hoarse shouts of our driver.

At length, when it seemed that I could not take another step, we were halted. I was freed from the harness. The thongs about my arms were removed, but my gag was allowed to remain. Nor, for a single instant did my driver let go of my arm.

He had led me forward some half dozen steps, then suddenly, by main strength, forced me to my hands and knees and began pushing me ahead in that position. Almost immediately I realized that I had left the free air. I was scrambling along like an animal on all fours over a hard, smooth surface.

I tried once to rise to my feet, but immediately thrust my head against a roofing less than a pace's distance from the flooring. I was in a low, tunnel-like passageway.

But after I had been driven forward two or three paces farther, my captor jerked me to my feet and removed the gag from my numbed jaws. I had scarce time to clear my mouth of the filth left there by the gag when another nasty object was thrust into it. At the same time my master guided one of my hands up to the stuff, and then let go.

"Eat," he said.

Then I realized that I was being fed.

It seemed to be a bit of raw flesh. To this moment I cannot think of it without being nauseated. I will not inflict a description of it upon the reader.

But I was famished from long lack of food, violent exercise, and exposure to the cold. So I managed somehow to choke down the fearful stuff.

I was so preoccupied for the moment in satisfying my craving for food that I did not realize when my captor left me, but when I came to take stock of my new surroundings I was alone.

I called aloud, but no one answered. I felt my way about. I was in a little cell, rounded in shape and a bare four paces across. The roof just missed my head. I found the passage through which I had come, but it was blocked. The air, though close and foul, was not so cold as the wind-swept wastes without.

Satisfied at length that I was in no immediate physical danger, I gave up to the extreme weariness that beset me, and throwing myself on the hard floor, at once fell into a deep sleep.

I must have slumbered long, for I awoke naturally, feeling greatly refreshed, though stiff and sore from my unwonted exertions and exposure.

I had paced back and forth for some time, limbering my creaking limbs, when a sound behind me caught me up short. I whirled about and saw to my astonishment in the wall of my cell an upright oblong of dim light.

As soon as my unused vision became accustomed to functioning again, I made out that it was an open door beyond which extended a short passage on whose walls a fitful radiance flickered.

Then for the first time I saw the dim form of a man beside me. He grasped me firmly by the arm and propelled me toward the opening.

Some ten paces forward I found myself suddenly thrust out into a great dome-shaped chamber, whose walls shone and sparkled under the light of innumerable flaming torches set in brackets all about.

There was a motley multitude assembled.

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A glance showed me the same grotesque, fur-clad, lance-equipped figures with hideous, sightless faces that we had seen sweeping down out of the darkness upon our ship.

But the sight that at once caught my attention and held me fascinated and amazed was a raised platform in the center of the cave, covered with heavy furs, on which reclined the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. And she had eyes, two dark orbs that were just now searching my face with deep curiosity.

It was a long moment before my fascinated gaze wandered in embarrassment from her lovely face. And then I almost shouted aloud in further amazement.

Reclining on the fur carpeting beside her, with the air of one very much at home, was our lost leader, Hunter.

I RECALL a fleeting feeling that I was still sleep in my cell and having a fantastic dream. The sudden appearance of light among this eyeless people whom I had become accustomed to think of as having no knowledge of light and no use for it; the presence of a beautiful woman with perfect eyes among these brutal savages, and above all the miraculous reappearance in such strange surroundings of our leader, who, I supposed, had long since perished out in the frozen seas some sleeps away—all gave a dreamlike atmosphere to the scene.

I was still staring, astounded, when Hunter, who had been gazing interestedly about, caught my eye and smiled greeting. He spoke no word, and taking my cue from that, I, too, remained silent, though I was eager to shout a score of questions.

Presently the woman on the dais turned to Hunter with every show of deference and addressed him, speaking clearly in our tongue, though with a strange, guttural accent.

"Look, O great chief," she said, "and take count of these two-eyed ones before you and see if they be all of your men. If there be one missing, or if so much as one little finger of them be hurt, these hunters of mine shall pay dearly."

"I have counted, O queen," he made reply. "All are here. Before I determine if they have been harmed I must go into the darkness with my councilors and learn further of what has happened."

I had glanced about me at the queen's first words, and was greatly relieved to see the rest of our ship's company standing about the dais, each with a sinister guard at his side armed with ready spear.

As he spoke, Hunter had risen to his feet. Simultaneously the queen stood up and stretched out a warning hand.

"I must crave your pardon for restraining you," she protested. "You shall be safe and comfortable while you are with us, and I would keep you for some time, for I have much to learn from you. Meanwhile, I cannot have you from my sight, for you have shown that you have strange powers over these simple, eyeless people of mine."

Hunter simply smiled indulgently in reply.

And the next instant I felt perfectly sure that I was dreaming. I could swear that I had not moved or so much as winked an eye. Yet the whole scene had vanished —the great hall, the crowd, the beautiful queen.

I was back in my cell, but this time it, too, was lighted. Half reclining on the floor beside me was Weaver, looking as amazed as I felt. Standing over us, a torch in his hand, wearing the same indulgent smile he had just turned on the queen, was Hunter.

"Well, old comrades," he exclaimed. "Get up and let me look you over. I didn't think a little while ago that we'd ever see each

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other again alive. No, you are not dreaming. I can see you both think you are."

Still half doubting our senses we arose and began a duet of eager questions.

"One at a time!" He laughed. "The simplest way to answer is to begin where we parted last and tell the whole story. I can guess pretty well what happened to you from what the queen has told me. So I'll give my experience first.

"When I left you people at the foot of the ship's ladder my one hope was that the savages hadn't yet found their way into the cabins. I believed that if I could run the gauntlet of their sharp ears and noses and once get inside, I could lock myself in, repair the vessel's machinery, and devise some scheme of getting rid of our boarders.

"Well, I got to the deck just in time. Right opposite the top of our ladder, you know, was the door into the motor cabin. By good luck it had slammed shut after you two dragged me out so unceremoniously, but it was not locked.

"Just as I reached the top of the ladder, one of the brutes was feeling the handle of the cabin door. I thought of nothing but the need of keeping him out of the cabin. But even then it didn't occur to me to use the spear I had brought with me. I'm not used to the idea of killing, you know, even if my name does come from ancestors who made that a business.

"I simply dropped the spear on the deck and made a dash at the fellow. He heard me, of course, and started to turn about just as I struck him. I caught him by the arms before he could raise his spear and whirled him away from the door.

"In the meantime a brother savage of his at my left had heard me also, and evidently catching the odor of a stranger, despite the familiar clothing I had on, let drive his spear in my direction. By chance, I had thrown the other's body in front of me just in time for it to catch the spear-thrust that was intended for me. The thing I clutched gave a choking cry and dropped bleeding in my arms, I shrank away, faint with horror for the moment.

"But I had not time to indulge in squeamishness. At that instant I caught sight of another savage with spear set and dilated nostrils sniffing the air in my direction, feeling his way along the edge of the cabin. I saw at a glance that he would reach me before I could wrench the door up; the noise I would make doing it would draw his spear unerringly at me.

"At that my hereditary instincts came to the rescue, I had just time to snatch up the spear I had dropped, dodge to one side, and thrust it through the savage's middle. Then I wrenched up the door, stumbled into the cabin, slammed down and locked the door, and dropped on the floor in a half-faint.

"There was a tumult of rage outside by now. A spear shattered the cabin window and one savage, fingering the ragged glass, cut his hand badly. He turned away in pain and shouted something that sounded like our word for 'bitten.'

"At that, the rest drew away from the cabin and stood doubtfully, muttering among themselves. I think by now they believed they had encountered some new form of great beast.

"Meantime I had recovered myself and began hastily revising my plans. I recognized the fact that fear had little part in the make-up of those stolid brutes, and it was only a matter of moments when they would break into the cabin. There was no time to repair our motors while they were at large. I must overcome them first.

"My first thought was of my laboratory. I had stored, you know, a very complete outfit of chemicals and chemical apparatus on the ship, not knowing what need I might have of them in the new world I expected to discover.

"Among them was a quantity of the volatile anesthetic discovered by my grandfather. You know of its use in surgery. A little of it sprayed in the open air will render instantly unconscious any living thing within its reach unless equipped with the neutralizing mask that the physician wears while using it. The asphyxiated person remains rigidly in the position he was in when overcome, and when he comes to, has no knowledge of the fact that he has been unconscious.

"WELL, I HAD one of the masks and a spray syringe in my cabinet. I loaded the sprayer in a hurry and put on the mask. Then I threw open the door and let them have a good dose of the stuff.

"The whole crew froze in their tracks on the instant. I had already planned how to handle them. I dug a coil of rope out of the storeroom, cut it into short lengths, and when the crowd came to, every man of them was tied hand and foot.

"And then, just as I was debating my next move, I heard a terrific uproar out over the ice. The ship leaped so violently

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that we were all hurled to the deck. I had just made out the ice mountain bearing down on us when the vessel crashed against the opposite side of the channel, and heeled violently over against the ice-field. The battery connections must have been wrenched away, for the lights went out, and so as to what happened after that I can only guess.

"Apparently the big mass of ice passed just to one side of us. We were tossed about like a plaything in the hands of a child. The vessel rolled almost completely over, first to one side, then the other. I thought surely her sides were broken in.

"But when the motion at length subsided we were still above water, though the ship lay over on her side at so steep a pitch that it was impossible to stand on her decks. I and my prisoners were huddled together in a mass against the lower rail. My first task was to restore the lights. What with the tangle of wreckage I found within the cabin, and the absolute darkness in which I must feel my way about, it was a long and difficult task. My labor, also, was accompanied by a most distracting uproar of wails and cries from my tethered prisoners. The amazing fashion in which they had suddenly found themselves bound and helpless, apparently without the aid of human hands, together with the climax of the ice-mountain's part in the performance, had at last affected even their rudimentary nerves.

"But at length I had our lights going again. I found that our shattered vessel lay high and dry on the surface of the ice-field, as though a giant hand had picked it up and hurled it there.

"I was far more concerned, however, over the fate of you people than with our ship's plight. I determined to use my prisoners in hunting you out, if you were still alive. In listening to their jargon I had discovered, as you doubtless have, that they had some words in common with our speech. Making use of this knowledge, I managed to make them understand that I had comrades out on the ice near where they had fought the great beast, and that they must lead me to you. They were now thoroughly cowed and ready to do anything I commanded.

"My next move was to unfasten one of the ship's lights and attach a small battery cell to it, so that I had a portable illumination. I did this just in time, for the main battery was still defective, and presently the other lights went out again. Then I untied the feet of my followers, still keeping their hands bound, however, and we climbed out to the ice.

"The strange, unerring instinct with which those sightless creatures found their way about was a source of endless wonder to me. Their sense of smell is so acute that they followed your trail from the ship straight here. We arrived only a little time after the last of you straggled in.

"Imagine my surprise at finding a considerable city here built of blocks of ice, and a beautiful woman, with eyes, and the ability to make and use light, ruling these eyeless savages with a rod of iron.

"Intelligent as she is, however, the bound condition of the warriors I led in, the tale they told, and my own appearance and speech, filled her with awe and fear of me. Nevertheless, it was necessary just now to give her a demonstration with my anesthetic to clinch the matter and prove that we are people not to be trifled with."

"So we really did see you in a big room with a beautiful woman by your side!" I exclaimed. "I was convinced that I was dreaming. I may be dreaming yet."

"Not at all!" he assured me. "You really saw what you thought you did. I brought my anesthetic spray with me. When I told her I was going into the darkness, I simply filled the atmosphere with the vapor, and she, with all the rest in the room, became instantly insensible, excepting myself, who was protected by the mask I held over my nose. You were all insensible long enough for me to bring you and Weaver here. When they woke up out there, it seemed to them that we had vanished instantaneously into thin air, for they had no sensation of losing consciousness.

"It's a handy little invention in our present plight. I had already rescued you from unpleasant slavery and myself from death, and I propose to use the influence it has given me to make the rest of our stay in the Land of Darkness both safe and comfortable."

ONCE convinced that we had not dreamed these remarkable experiences, we were filled with a not unnatural curiosity as to this strange woman whom Hunter called the queen. How could it be possible that from so degenerate a race, whose eyes had atrophied from lack of use, if indeed it ever possessed those organs, could have sprung this beautiful creature, not only possessed of perfect eyes, but feeling the need of using them and able to devise a way of doing so?

Moreover, what was the explanation of

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her comparatively fluent use of our speech among a people whose vocabulary consisted only of a few simple and badly distorted words?

But we found Hunter as much at loss as we on these points. His brief interview with her, however, had convinced him that she was no freakish offshoot of the race of the blind that came of utterly different origin. He had asked her if there were other people in the Land of Darkness who were able to see, and she had assured him that she had never before seen eyes in a human head. From her earliest infancy she had lived among these blind people, as far as she could remember.

How artificial light had first come to be used in this Land of Darkness she did not know. Her earliest recollection was of life in a small ice-hut, on the wall of which was a burning torch. Someone who took care of her then had shown her a great store of unburned torches, and taught her to light a new one whenever the old one died down. Otherwise there was no way to create new light. Later she had learned to make the torches from the hair of beasts saturated with oil tried from their flesh.

This guardian of hers, whether parent or not, must have died about the time she was taught the use of the torches, for she could recall nothing of him or her after that. She knew, however, that she had been taught to speak before this time.

We assumed that this person also must have possessed sight to have known the use of light.

She had evidently inherited a good brain, for she soon saw her advantage over those around her and brought them under her unquestionable rule. She had used much of her energy in compelling her subjects to build larger and larger huts, till now she ruled over a city of ice buildings, some of them equal in size to small mansions.

"But I am not so much interested in the origin of this lady, fascinating as she is, as I am in my plans for recovering and repairing the ship and continuing our explorations," Hunter concluded.

"How will that be possible?" questioned the practical-minded Weaver. "If our vessel is lodged on solid ice, and no open channel near it, what good will it do to make repairs? We cannot float her again. My advice would be to rescue from the vessel several of the life-rafts, our food supply, and other necessary equipment, and compel these savages to drag them back over the ice the way we came until we are near the Land of Light.

"Then we may be able to paddle back to the light, and perhaps be picked up by a passing merchant vessel. Later, if you insist, we can secure another ship and make a second attempt."

This proposal, I could see, met with no favor from Hunter. It seemed rather to irritate him.

"There are still some things about the ship that even you do not know, Weaver," he replied, with some asperity "In the first place, it could hardly be replaced at all. Moreover it has in it an appliance I have never explained to any of you. Like the lights which were a complete surprise to you, this contrivance has never had a practical trial, but I feel equally sure it will succeed. I will not explain it until I can try it. If it fails, then I'll consider your advice.

"None of these miracle-working devices of mine are at all original. I am no inventor. I have simply applied well-known discoveries that have never before been used because the need has never before arisen. That has been the curse of the race. We have suffered little need. So we have not, in ages, developed anything but useless, theoretical knowledge."

I saw that Hunter was off on his hobby again, and hastened to interrupt him as tactfully as possible.

"Wouldn't it be well to return to the queen before she recovers from her surprise enough to send searchers after us?" I suggested. "We can lay our plans a little later for return to the ship. We mustn't risk spoiling the effect of your trick."

"You are right," he assented. "At the same time we must push our plans for escape as quickly as possible."

"Can't be too quick about it to suit me," grumbled Weaver. "If I am forced to eat much more of that cursed grease, I'll grow fur and begin growling like an animal. As it was, I came near biting my keeper's hand when he fed me the stuff."

"Come down the passage close behind me," Hunter directed. "I'll give them another sleeping dose and we'll return to our places under cover of it. Hold you breath when I give the signal, and it won't effect you."

So we extinguished the torch, stole on tiptoe down the passage, and peered into the great chamber. We need not have been at such pains to preserve quiet. The crowd was in an uproar. The savages were all jabbering excitedly at once.

On the dais the queen sat half upright, leaning backward on her hands, and star-

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ing in terror and amazement at the spot beside her from which Hunter had so miraculously vanished.

Then our leader gave the signal on which we had agreed. Weaver and I took deep breaths and held them as Hunter had directed. He clapped his mask over his face, drew from under his tunic his magic sprayer, and pressed the piston.

The effect was almost instantaneous. The outcries of the savages ceased. Each was caught and held rigid in whatever position he happened to be at the moment.

In some instances, particularly, the result was most grotesque. I noted especially my own keeper, who stood poised over the spot where I should have been, his suddenly stiffened clawlike fingers clutching at the empty air.

"Now, quick! Back to our places! Just as we were before!" whispered Hunter.

Weaver and I slipped into position beside our respective keepers, and Hunter threw himself down on the fur-covered dais beside the dead-eyed, staring queen.

A MOMENT passed. Then through all the room quavered a sighing as of the wind through the leaves of a garden, and the breath returned to the crowd. Each continued his own clamor where it had been broken off till the surprised shouts of the keepers of Weaver and myself informed them that the lost were found, and they fell into stolid silence. I could not forbear amusement, too, at the bewilderment in the faces of those of our ship's company to whom the trick had not been explained.

The emotions of the queen betrayed a more highly sensitized nervous organism. The instant the light of consciousness returned to her face, she leaped to her feet. A moment she stared incredulously at Hunter, then, with a piercing scream that caused every eager lance of her motley followers to leap to attention, she swayed forward in a faint. She would have fallen from the dais had not Hunter sprung up and caught her in his arms.

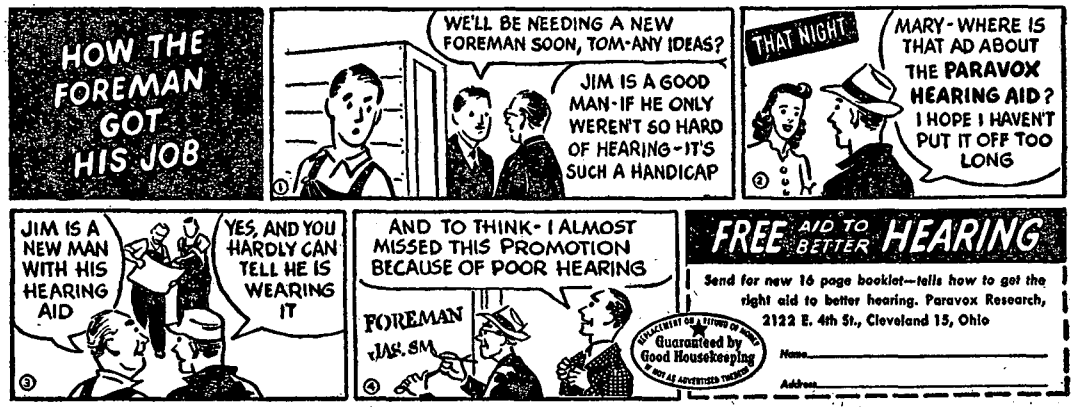
Gently he laid her on her rug; then stood awkwardly over her, for once at a loss what to do. But presently she stirred and moaned a little; then suddenly sat up and again stared at Hunter, shrinking away from him in terror.

Our leader by now had recovered some degree of his accustomed ease. He was altogether unused to dealing with hysterical women, however, and for the moment I had feared that in his discomfiture he might lose some of the advantage he had gained over this savage queen who had such power over our destiny.

"Have no fear, O queen," he said, with a return to the ceremonial manner he had affected in addressing her. "We are your friends, and mean no harm to you or your people. We of the two eyes, as you have seen, possess powers as much greater than yours as yours are greater than those of these eyeless people whom you rule. It will be of no avail, then, to try to restrain us against our will.

"We ask first that you release these men of mine and send your men away while we confer with you. That you may feel safer, we grant that you keep as many of your spearmen standing guard at the passage-ways as there are men of us in our party. It will be of no use for them to attack us. If they try it, they will suddenly find themselves bound again as they did when they assailed me on my ship."

For a little time the queen stood irresolute, looking thoughtfully first at Hunter then at us, and then at the sightless faces of her guests. When at last she spoke it was in the guttural jargon of the blind tribe. For an instant I half feared that


HOW THE FOREMAN GOT HIS JOB
WE'LL BE NEEDING A NEW FOREMAN SOON, TOM-ANY IDEAS?
JIM IS A GOOD MAN-IF HE ONLY WEREN'T SO HARD OF HEARING-IT'S SUCH A HANDICAP
THAT NIGHT
MARY-WHERE IS THAT AD ABOUT THE PARAVOX HEARING AID? I HOPE I HAVEN'T PUT IT OFF TOO LONG
JIM IS A NEW MAN WITH HIS HEARING AID
YES, AND YOU HARDLY CAN TELL HE IS WEARING IT
AND TO THINK- I ALMOST MISSED THIS PROMOTION BECAUSE OF POOR HEARING
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Hunter had overestimated the impression he had made upon her, and that in ignorant bravado she was about to order an attack upon us.

But instead, to the relief both of our sight and nostrils, the filthy brutes wheeled about and departed. A moment later the members of our ship's company, who had been separated under such harrowing circumstances, now freed from restraint, were exchanging intimate greetings.

A little later I noted that the queen had recovered from her fright, and that Hunter at last seemed perfectly at ease in her presence. They were conversing intimately together, and on the face of each was evident the keenest interest in the other.

It had already occurred to me that we were not getting very far with our proposed conference over the rescue of our ship.

It was Weaver, the blunt, who broke up this little tête-à-tête.

This direct old mariner, after briefly greeting his shipmates, had been pacing about uneasily, casting furtive glances of displeasure now and then at the pair on the dais.

At length he stepped resolutely over and addressed our leader.

"Hunter, I beg leave to interrupt," he began.

At his first word the queen glanced up, startled, a far-away look came into her eyes, the look of one striving to recall something out of the distant past.

"Hunter, you said," she half whispered. "Hunter? Hunter? Hunter? What does that mean? I've heard it before, long ago."

"Hunter is my name," he explained wonderingly. "In the land I came from my people long ago hunted wild beasts, as your people do now. So the name of Hunter was given to us."

A look of slow recollection and memory grew in the girl's beautiful face.

"Oh, now I remember, remember just a little, as in a room where the torch has burned low and you can see only shadows. I have seen eyes before. There was a woman who took care of me and taught me this speech that is like yours. And there was a man who taught me to use the torches, and they both had eyes. And the woman called the man Hunter, and they both called me their little Hunter."

We had all gathered about the dais by now, and every man of us heard these last words. I think, however, that I was the first to grasp their import. My trade of chronicler kept me familiar with the events of our world. It had also trained my mind to the ready tracing of relationship between past and present happenings and to the drawing of quick inferences.

The last words of the queen completed a mosaic of facts and inferences that my mind had been constructing, both consciously and subconsciously around the mysterious character. On a sudden I saw the meaning of its weird pattern.

"Hunter!" I cried. "Don't you see it? This lady is your kinswoman, daughter of your cousin who sailed away when you were a babe, and never returned."

THE reader will recall that early in this tale I made brief mention of this lost cousin of Hunter's who had returned from a voyage with a weird tale of adventure in the margin of the Land of Darkness. I remembered that there had been several women in the party making that remarkable voyage.

One of these women, a member of his clan, of course, that former Hunter had married shortly after their return. She had sailed with him on his second, ill-fated voyage from which none of their party had ever come back, and till this moment their fate had been an absolute mystery.

It was now suddenly made clear to me by the queen's recollections, that their ship had entered that Land of Darkness again and there been wrecked. The wedded couple had evidently escaped with their lives, only to spend them among the blind savages, among whom this their daughter was born.

My impulsive statement seemed to mean little to the queen. She stared at me resentfully as though I were simply an annoying person who had interrupted her reverie. Plainly she was absorbed in trying to recall more of that dim, early memory of hers.

Hunter was for the moment dazed. Then the truth of what I had said forced itself home. Even in the uncertain torchlight I could see that he had turned very pale.

A moment he glared at me almost angrily. Then he fastened his gaze on the face of his new found cousin and held it there till I thought he would never have done with the drinking in of her loveliness. It was as though he had noted for the first time that loveliness in the light of this suddenly revealed relationship.

Till this moment she had been to him a being apart, a strange, exotic, hardly

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human creature, to be feared and guarded against. No bridge of human feeling could cross between two so alien. Now she stood suddenly revealed as blood of his blood, one, like himself, lost from the Land of Light in this realm of darkness. Swift pity replaced fear and aversion.

I saw this emotion appear in his face and grow until I fancied I read there something more than pity. I suddenly remembered the Lady of the South, the only other woman I had ever seen who compared in beauty with this queen.

I remembered the strange doctrine of love before marriage which that lady had advanced, and the rare expression of tender regard in her face when she had mentioned Hunter. That same look, to my horror, I saw now copied on the face of our leader as he gazed on his new-found kinswoman.

I say I viewed it with horror, for even as I admired the fair face of this woman I did not trust her. I shuddered at the thought of what might befall us all if our leader fell under the spell of this fascinating creature.

Further, I had an uneasy suspicion that Hunter, who from our earliest boyhood together had been my ideal hero, was revealing a new side of his nature, a weak side he had kept sternly hidden from his best friends; in short, a weakness for the lure of women—a manifestation most unusual among the men of Venus.

But even as this suspicion took form within me, I had to admit in all charity a certain measure of excuse for my hero. Probably no man in Venus had ever so been assailed by such unusual allurements in two separate embodiments, very different superficially, yet fundamentally alike in their strange power to attract.

Had not I myself been forced to admit the fascination of the beautiful Lady of the South? And, now, much as I distrusted the charming barbarian before me, I realized that my pulse quickened a little in her presence.

Hunter had the reputation among his friends of being particularly indifferent to womankind. Indeed, it was an open secret that his father, the Chief Patriarch, was not a little disturbed that his eldest son had gone so long without choosing a mate.

At the time of our sailing on this voyage he had all but convinced me that this indifference had developed to the point where he had become a confirmed woman-hater.

When he had sent for me, on my return from my journey to the south, to enlist me in his undertaking, he had shown more interest in my recent interview with the Lady of the South than in the plans for his voyage. It was due to this that I learned so little of the details of his plans in the brief time he could give me.

I remember being a bit disturbed at the expression on his face as I had spoken of the lady. It had reminded me strongly of the emotion the lady herself had betrayed when I had spoken of him to her. Though he had hastened to express disgust at her declaration of love for him, a member of another clan, and to assure me he had no sympathy with any proposal to depart thus from the sacred customs of the land, I got the impression that the lady had in reality strongly appealed to him, and that he was going on his voyage as much to escape her overtures as for his avowed purpose of seeking new lands.

He had hastened, a little vehemently, I thought, to declare that women had no place in his life; that they were a disturbing element, and that he had accordingly refused to take any of them with him on this voyage.

At the same time, I felt convinced that the tale of this strange romance was not finished. Should Hunter ever return alive from his mad voyage, it would be, I feared, only to ruin his future career by an irregular entanglement with the daughter of the Patriarch of the South, a thing that might have a far-reaching effect on the future of our people.

But now I viewed the episode of the Lady of the South as but one horn of a serious dilemma. Here in the wilds of the Land of Darkness was another allurement equally disastrous. In this case, the charmer was a kinswoman, and thus he was not safeguarded from the union with her by the custom of Venus.

Would be become so obsessed as to remain with her here, forgetful of his home and his race and his high purpose? Or would he attempt to bring back this autocratic barbarian to the Land of Light as his wife? To my mind, either move meant his ruin.

SO YOU may well imagine that with all these possibilities in mind I watched with great uneasiness the drama before me.

Some of my perturbation, at least, was apparently shared by Weaver. He had not finished the sentence that had brought

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out this astonishing revelation. He seemed to have forgotten it. With a deep scowl on his face, he stood in silence studying the faces of the pair on the dais.

The rest of our company stood about, frankly incredulous. By the way most of them eyed me I could see they suspected I had taken leave of my senses.

The queen broke the spell. With a reluctant sigh, she brought her absent gaze back to Hunter.

"I can remember no more of my past history," she said

Then, as though for the first time recalling that I had spoken, she darted a puzzled glance at me.

"But what does this man mean?" she asked. "Whose daughter am I? What does he mean by a kinswoman?"

Despite her general memory of the tongue taught her as a child, these words designating family relationships had little meaning for her. The facts for which they stood had no place in her tragically lonely life.

"Little cousin," Hunter began in significant contrast to the formal address he had employed toward her before, "a long time ago in the Land of Light from which I came a man of my name had many children. One of these became my father's father. Another had a son who sailed the sea in ships. Once he sailed away, and a woman, his mate, sailed with him. Their ship was lost, and no one of its company were ever again heard from.

"But now you tell of two people who called themselves Hunter, as I call myself. No other Hunters were ever lost from the Land of Light. So those cousins of mine who were lost must have been those whom you remember. They must have been your father and mother, for they called you Hunter, too. And that is why you have two eyes like us and why you speak like us."

For a long time the queen considered this in silence.

"I understand," she said simply at last.

But she seemed neither glad nor sorry. She sat again, lost in thought. We all watched her compassionately. The rest of our company now seemed convinced that, after all, I had spoken with reason.

"From the Land of Light you came?" the queen questioned suddenly, turning again to Hunter.

"Yes," he assented, "from far away, where the light shines forever and there are no torches needed, and everyone has eyes."

"Once I saw it long ago. I remember now," she remarked casually.

"What!" Hunter exclaimed, starting up. "You saw it! But I thought you said you had always lived in the Land of Darkness!"

"I always have," she returned in surprise. "But I saw the light once a long way off. I was a little girl then, and I stood just outside here. A great wind blew, and I stood up and saw the light way up over my head like a little torch far off."

"'Tis foolishness; a child's fable!" grunted Weaver in my ear.

But it was evident that Hunter took it seriously. He was all interest, and at once fell to asking her a score of eager questions, to all of which she could give but little answer.

"By the Great Over Spirit!" swore Weaver disgustedly under his breath. "He believes it! He will be asking us next to try flying with him in search of lights in the upper air.

"And if he does," he added after a moment with a rueful grin, "I'll be fool enough to try it, though the Over Spirit knows I'm no great success as a bird."

CHAPTER IV

A NEW DAWN

I HAD hoped, now we had been received into the good graces of the queen and were no longer held in the status of slaves, that we would be served with food more palatable to our vegetarian tastes. But in this we were disappointed. At the queen's orders we were presently served again with the same greasy provender that Weaver had so pointedly railed against.

With the prospect of shortly returning to our ship, however, we consoled ourselves with the thought that this would be our last meal of this sort. Evidently there was no better food to be had, for the queen did us the honor to dine with us, and I must say amazed me with the daintiness with which she handled such undainty food despite the fact that she had no eating utensils save her slim, brown fingers.

Having eaten, the queen retired to her private chamber, first ordering some of her men to bring in a pile of soft rugs, and telling us we could have the use of the big room for our sleep.

Hunter established watches as on shipboard, roughly measuring the time by the state of the burning torches. Despite the

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queen's assurances and show of friendliness, we by no means trusted her retainers. She had assured us we would be left alone, but no sooner had our company become quiet than we could hear faint movements about the passageways leading into the main room, and occasional low, guttural mutterings. It was plain that we were under guard, and we were spurred to the utmost vigilance.

The first watch set and the rest of the company sleeping, Hunter sought out Weaver and myself and took us to one side for a consultation.

"As soon as we have slept," he announced, "the queen will take a company of her men and pilot us back to our vessel, and we will soon be on our way."

"You still think you can rescue the vessel!" Weaver asked.

"I hope so, but if not, your proposal to drag our rafts and supplies back will be adopted."

He hesitated for a moment as if uncertain whether to confide his next thought.

"I have something else in mind which you may not approve, but which I feel is my plain duty," he declared finally.

My heart sank. I knew in advance what his proposal was to be. His next words confirmed my intuition.

"The queen of this race of savages is my kinswoman, a woman entitled to high standing in the Hunter clan. It is not right that she be left in this horrible place. I propose, if possible, to take her back with us to the Land of Light, the home of her ancestors."

He paused and searched our faces with an air of determination, as if he surmised our disapproval but meant, neverthless, to stick by his purpose.

"I feel it my duty to my family," he insisted, as though we had already protested.

"Has the lady given her consent?" I asked for want of anything better to say.

"Not yet. I have not yet put the question to her pointblank. But I have been preparing her by picturing the delights of the Land of Light, and I think her curiosity will win her."

This from the man who, a little time ago, had railed against the dullness of the Land of Never Change and fled from it to seek change even at the peril of his life. I reflected bitterly on the decaying effect on a man's character that followed the lure of a pretty girl, but held my peace.

"But what if the lady objects?" insinuated Weaver.

He pondered this a moment.

"In that case," he replied at last, "much as I disapprove of such measures, I think I shall use force."

And this from the son of our Chief Patriarch, whose solemn warning against the dangerous doctrine of force had rung in our ears as we sailed! Character decay, indeed!

"I feel that you are not asking our advice," Weaver blurted out; "but I for one can see no good from trusting this savage woman aboard our ship."

Hunter chose to ignore his shipmaster's rudeness, but pushed his argument from another point.

"I feel, too, that we owe her much for the help she is giving us in restoring us to our ship, and that she can be of much further service with her knowledge of the Dark Land in case other delays keep us long in these unfamiliar regions.

"However, thanks to her memory of the light she saw in her childhood, I feel sure now that my theory of other regions of light beyond the Belt of Darkness was correct, and that we have not far to go to reach it.

"It probably seems so to her childish memory. My belief is, you will remember from my explanations, that only the upper portion of the great sea of air has the property of light. Our land, being a high, rounded hill, projects up into that light. There is, I believe, near us another high hill which extends even higher into the light."

"I hope you are right," sighed Weaver doubtfully. "Only let us get out of here, and I'll consent to carrying a whole shipload of savages. I promise you, though I shall hold my nose for the most of the voyage"

Hunter laughed good-naturedly and bade us seek some sleep while there was yet time.

WHEN I awoke the entire company was stirring. Indeed, I think Hunter had not slept at all. Despite his enthrallment he realized that in case any of the blind savages should undertake murder on their own account our only defense would lie in the little anesthetic sprayer which he kept in his tunic.

Presently the queen appeared in one of the passageways and announced that she and her company were ready for the start.

I shall never forget the hardships of that short trip back to the spot where we had

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last seen our vessel. True, our journey from it to the ice city had partaken nothing of luxury. We had been assailed by the bitter cold, by the harsh physical strain of dragging our captors' burdens and the string of our drivers' whips, and the mental anguish of dread of approaching death in horrible form.

But the air, though stinging cold, had been quiet and clear save for an occasional puff of breeze or flurry of fine snow crystals. Moreover, our rigorous physical task, though painful, had served to keep a little warmth in our bodies.

Now as we crawled out of the low passage behind Hunter, carrying his powerful light, we were suddenly blinded by a smother of heavy snow crystals whipped by a gale that snatched the breath from our nostrils and smote our bodies with its icy blast as though we had gone forth stark naked.

Our escort seemed little discommoded by these astonishing weather conditions, which apparently were nothing unusual to them. Those blind creatures, muffled with extra furs until they looked like little more than shapeless bundles, stood about a row of flat frames, made of animals' bones fastened together with thongs of hide. I have since learned to call them sleds. They were dragged over the ground by a team of the savages attached to each by thongs. I surmised that it was one of these contrivances I had myself recently helped to drag across country.

The queen bade us to dispose ourselves on these sleds. This time we were to be drawn, an exchange of status with our former captors which at first pleased me greatly, but which I later regretted when I felt my inactive limbs slowly congealing from the cold.

Hunter, Weaver, and myself occupied the front sled with the queen. We three men were glad to bury ourselves, heads and all, under the pile of furs that were provided for us. But our hostess sat up in front, undaunted by the fury of the storm, and with merciless skill wielded a long whip-lash over the unfortunates who drew us.

How long we rode thus I have no means of knowing. How our blind guides made out the way will, to this day, remain a mystery. I can only surmise that these eyeless creatures had developed some sense of direction unknown to us, who depend on the power of sight.

I passed gradually from intense suffering with the cold to a sense of numb drowsiness. I would undoubtedly have passed from this to the unconsciousness which I am told precedes death from freezing, had not the queen roused us from our lethargy and bade us get out and stir our congealing blood.

I realized then that the wind had died down and the snow was ceasing. We were back now at the margin of the level ice that lay over the sea. It could not be far from here to the point where our wrecked ship lay.

After a little we clambered back to our sleds and started over the ice-field, all eyes strained ahead as far as Hunter's light carried, to make out, if possible, any trace of our vessel.

Hunter and the queen were now engaged in low-pitched conversation. From words that I caught now and then I inferred he was trying to induce her to go with us on the remainder of our voyage.

Suddenly I heard her exclaim in tones that carried every word to Weaver and myself with ominous clearness.

"I will go with you, my cousin, if you will have no mysteries hidden from me. Tell me the magic secret by which you disappear from my sight and return again without my seeing you come and go, and by which you bound up my brave warriors without their knowing it. I fear such powers when I cannot understand them. Teach them to me, and I will go where you say."

We could not hear Hunter's reply, and we were filled with deep misgivings lest he trust this wild woman with the secret which alone assured our safety.

My attention was diverted presently, however, by signs that we neared our goal. A wide strip of open water appeared beside our course. Along this we skirted for some distance.

Suddenly there loomed up dead ahead an almost perpendicular wall that glistened dazzlingly under the rays of our light.

It was one of the great floating ice-mountains lodged directly across our course.

Our sled halted, and we stared stupidly at this barricade.

After a moment there came a full-mouthed oath from Weaver.

"Look! Look!" he cried.

He was pointing at the top of the ice-mountain high over our heads.

We looked and gasped in amazement and dismay. Some hundred paces up in the air, frozen fast in the summit of the great cliff far out of our reach, hung our devoted vessel. The wreck had evidently been

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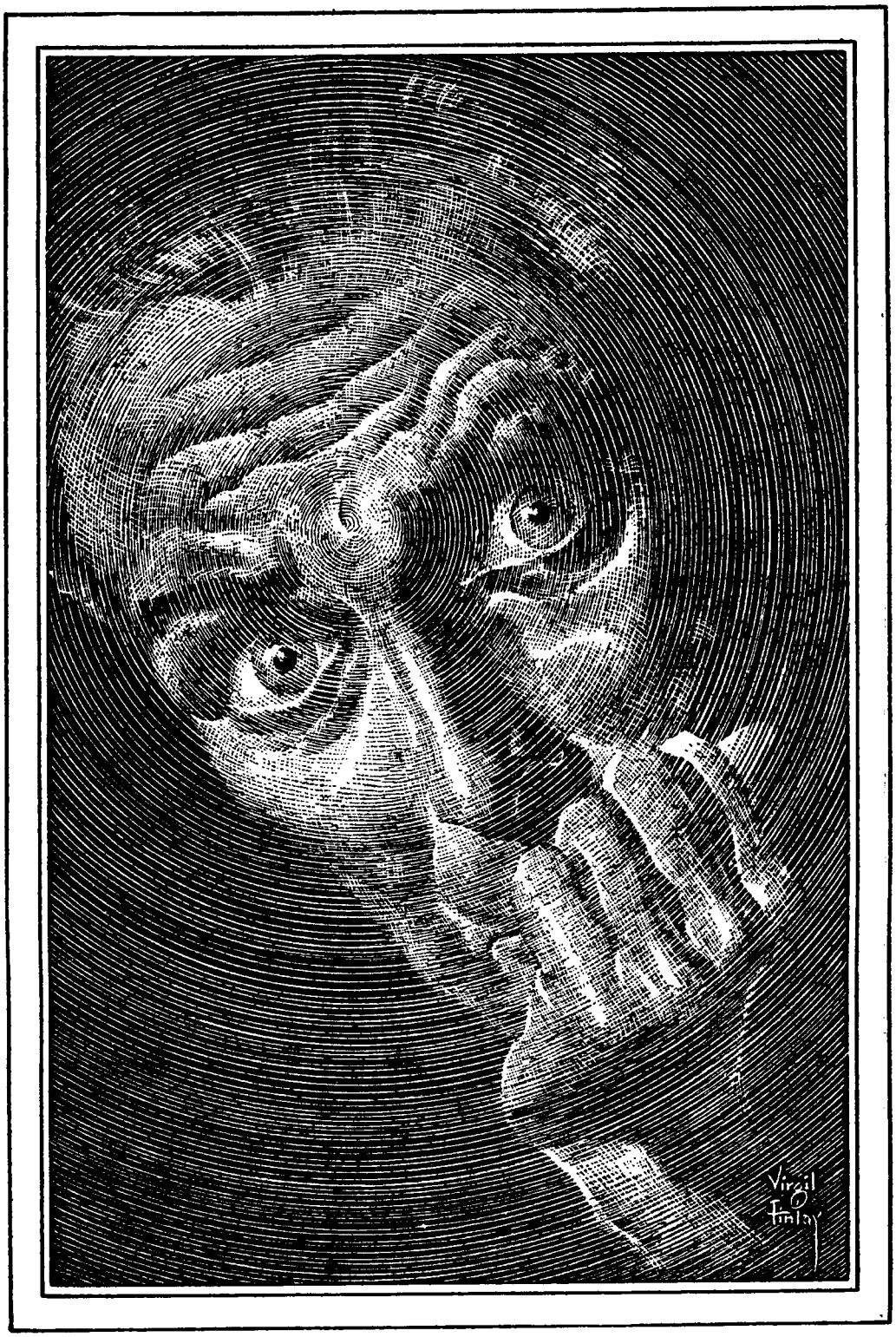

I felt that I must hear some sound or lose my reason!

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caught in the edge of the mountain which had later turned half over, thrusting the ship high in air.

Then we were aroused from our stupid contemplation of this appalling disaster by a mocking laugh.

The queen had leaped from her sled and was executing a weird dance of exultation on the edge of the open water.

In her hand we saw to our horror the little spraying apparatus and receptacle for the powerful anesthetic on which depended our hold over the savages.

"Now, cousin," she chanted tauntingly, "I have your secret, and you and your two-eyed followers are in my power. There is your ship. Take it away with you, if you can. You will not take it. You will stay with me in the Land of Darkness and do my bidding!"

With that she flung the apparatus far into the flood.

THE momentary silence following this disheartening denouement was broken by a hoarse cry from Weaver. Beside himself with rage he dashed at the queen with fist upraised.

She laughed in his very face, and with a guttural word or two she dodged behind a group of her followers who, with outstretched arms, closed in on our infuriated shipmaster and quickly overpowered him.

"Close around Hunter!" I yelled. "We'll die fighting."

I dashed forward, and our comrades responded to my cry. There was a sharp command from the queen. In a twinkling a circle of menacing lances formed around us.

All this time Hunter had stood as he was when the queen had executed her coup, the light still held above his head, his face turned toward his treacherous cousin in a look of hurt incredulity.

But now his expression suddenly changed to one of wary sternness. An instant he glared at the queen in cold disdain; then turned his back squarely upon her and held up a restraining hand toward us.

"Stop! No violence!" he commanded sharply. "We have no wish to disobey our queen. We will gladly stay with her if she wishes."

But the look he gave us belied his words. Not one of us but realized that his infatuation had vanished and that he was again his old resourceful self. Had the queen been reared among a people with faces capable of expression she would have been put on her guard by his change of countenance. But there was in her manner only an increase of triumphant vanity.

We who knew Hunter, however, felt a sudden return of assurance. Between the words of his apparently submissive speech we read an admonition to make no outbreak for the present, but wait patiently till he could find means of circumventing our foes.

"Little cousin," he said—turning to her again, his eyes no longer revealing his feelings—"you were hasty with us. The thing you threw away was of no further use. It had lost its power. Our ship, too, is helpless. The moment I saw it fastened there I knew it was meant that we should remain together. That ship, though it can never again ride the water, will make you a palace such as you never dreamed of. I have told you a little of its comfort, its warmth, its great lights, the delicious food with which it is stored. We will be very happy in it, little cousin, if we can find a way to climb to it."

I could see at once that the queen was fascinated by the idea, and that she was of half a mind to trust Hunter.

"We will visit the ship," she ruled. "My men will cut steps up the ice with their spears. But, though you speak fair words, my cousin, I do not trust the two-eyed ones with you. I will first have their hands bound that they can do us no harm. You I will not bind, but I will take the light and with one of my spear men will stay with you to see that you try no further mischief."

So once more our hands were tied and we submitted with some misgivings despite our belief that sooner or later Hunter's superior mind would get the best of his barbarian cousin. The mere prospect of getting aboard our familiar ship again and once more eating real food greatly heartened us. I am sure that the latter item was uppermost in the mind of Weaver, whose outbreak had won him a severe mauling and the honor of a double guard. His bruised face now wore an expression almost cheerful.

Several of the blind men were set to work chipping at the cliff, and they were evidently practised in scaling such obstacles, for they made rapid progress up the glittering slope. After no great space of time a pathway of rude steps was completed up to the foot of the very ship's ladder which still dangled from her rail.

Then, at a word from the queen, we began the ascent, she leading with Hunter.

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A little later our mixed company were all assembled in the big main cabin, which we packed to the door.

Our good ship, to be sure, was like some mutilated dead thing, cold and damp from disuse and long inactivity of its heating apparatus, wreckage scattered from stem to stern, and withal perched high out of its natural element in the clutches of this ice giant.

Yet to our fair captor it was all a bewitching novelty. Girlish curiosity utterly unseating her erstwhile craft and caution, she flitted from one thing to another, asking a thousand eager questions. Hunter, on his part, appeared to have no idea in his head save to act the kindly and obliging host.

"Now, if the queen will permit and will accompany me while I do so," he suggested at last, "I will repair our machine for making heat and light and give her the comfort I promised. Then we shall have some food."

She consented readily, but with some return of her caution, for she ordered two of her guards to accompany her.

Hunter led the way from the main cabin, not to the motor cabin, where he would have gone had his purpose been what he stated, but to his own cabin, where he kept his cabinets of chemicals.

Not many moments later he returned alone, a triumphant smile on his face and a warning gesture for silence. In his hands were a coil of rope, a heavy knife, and another anesthetic sprayer.

Our guards stirred uneasily at hearing Hunter's footsteps alone, and our leader acted hastily. Pinching his own nose and motioning us to do likewise, he released a charge of the anesthetic. The savages stiffened into insensibility at once.

Hunter threw open the cabin windows so that the vapor might be cleared away and give us a chance to breathe again, and then released us from our bonds.

"Quick," he directed. "Each of you take a piece of this rope and tie these fellows up."

As he spoke he began cutting the rope into lengths, and in less time than I have used in the telling the tables were again turned on our blind friends

"Absurdly simple, wasn't it?" he exclaimed when we were through. "Simply led my pretty cousin and her brute guards up to my chemical cabinet and unstopped a jar of anesthetic. They are tied up down there now."

At that moment an angry wail from Hunter's cabin told us that the humiliated queen had recovered consciousness.

"Now," Hunter decided, "we'll keep my cousin with us, and the two guards she has with her in my cabin. As for the rest of these brutes, we'll take their spears away from them and let them slide back down the ice-mountain. We'll loosen the rope on the last one a little so that in time he can untie the rest. By that time they won't be able to bother us any."

I ASSURE you that we carried out these instructions with great gusto. I confess, though, that I felt some humane qualms as I saw these helpless creatures slide sprawling down from so great a height. But the promptness with which each bounced to his feet and continued his horrible clamor convinced me that these creatures were of too tough a fiber to be greatly injured by such an experience.

I have invariably said "he" and "his" in referring to these beings, for convenience merely. All the while I was among them I was never able to distinguish between their sexes. As a matter of fact, we later learned that the two we held captive permanently were of opposite sexes.

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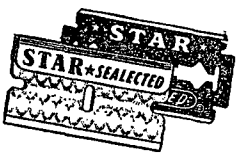

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As soon as we had eaten and rested a little we set to work under Hunter's directions to restore order on the vessel and repair the damaged parts. It was a long and difficult task. The ship had been injured more than appeared at first sight. As for the vital machinery, only Hunter was thoroughly familiar with its intricacies, and it was necessary for him to supervise his mechanics in every detail of their work.

Meanwhile the queen alternately raged and sulked in the cabin to which she had been assigned as a prisoner Her two blind attendants, once convinced that resistance was useless, accepted the situation with characteristic resignation.

Not so with their brethren whom we had so unceremoniously thrust down into outer darkness. They kept up a continous uproar of snarling rage, thrashing about in aimless circles, tugging at their bonds, and now and then a more enterprising spirit seeking to scale the ice cliff without the use of his hands, only to slip back helplessly to the ice field.

But of what these impotent savages might do to us we had now little fear. They had not yet found means to unloose their manacles. They had no weapons. Even should they succeed in mounting to the ship, we had, as it seemed then, an overwhelming advantage, our company now armed with their lances and stationed in mass at the top of this difficult ascent, up which, at the most, only two or three could reach us at once.

So we stationed a watch at the ladder-head with instructions to sound the alarm if the foe made any headway toward us, and went on with our work without further apprehension in that direction.

What did harass my mind, however, and I dare say that of each of my fellows, save possibly Hunter, was as to what booted all this effort to put the vessel in shape when some hundred paces of perpendicular ice lay between her and the level of the sea, and even that so nearly frozen over that escape through open water was highly problematical. Did he intend to tumble the ship from its perch? If so, the wreck would again be more complete than ever.

But we were spurred on against our judgments by the calm, confident manner of our leader, and presently the craft began to assume an appearance of order. After some three sleeps Hunter had the heating and lighting apparatus at work again, and it remained only for him to complete the restoration of the driving machinery.

It was at this point in the work that I was resting for a moment, standing near the ladder head and watching with sardonic amusement the gyrations of our baffled foe below us.

I noted idly that one of the savages stood quietly apart from the rest, apparently giving all his attention to working at his bonds. Suddenly he gave a mighty wrench with both arms, and his hands flew free. He must have been the man whose hands we had tied loosely.

Once loose, this man worked with incredible speed and purpose. He fairly flew from one of his companions to another, unfastening their bonds, and in a few moments they were all free.

In the meantime I had called to several of my shipmates who happened to be at ease for the moment, and together we watched this performance with purely idle curiosity, little dreaming there was any menace in it.

But now we realized a certain definiteness in the movements of the mob. Under the harsh direction of one of their number they were forming in a compact column three wide at the foot of the ice stairway. Before we realized the wisdom of sounding a warning, there was another command, and with a rush this solid mass of infuriated savages swarmed up the cliff with irresistible fury.

Then we cried out in chorus and our men sprang to the spears. But it was immediately evident that our untrained spearwork would make little headway stopping that rush of hardened fighters whom we had already seen held death in little concern.

They were half way to us when Hunter stepped from the motor cabin and looked over the rail. He calmly watched the onrush for a moment, then turned away and entered the motor-cabin again.

The top of the oncoming line was within a pace of the ladder when the ship's motors suddenly began to whir at full speed. The next instant one of the savages seized the lowest rung of the ladder.

At that we watchers from the deck gasped in amazement. The ladder had been snatched from the fellow's hands, and he fell tumbling back over the heads of those behind.

The deck trembled and lurched under us. We felt a sinking sensation in our stomachs. There was a wide and growing gap between the savage column at the ice-mountain's top and the bottom of the ship.

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Our great vessel, like a giant bird, was rising straight into the air!

MY FIRST thought, as I clung to the pitching rail for support, was that some new cataclysm of nature, some tremendous eruptive force in the great ice-mountain had hurled our ship skyward from its summit. Momentarily I expected the upward flight to cease and the ship to fall, pitching back to certain destruction.

But, on the contrary, the steady rise continued. The air seemed to be rushing down past us with the speed of a great wind. The pitching quickly subsided, and the vessel rode on an even keel. While we still stared over the rail, too alarmed to speak, the icy surface of Venus passed beyond the reach of our lights. We were swimming, now, above a sea of swirling vapor.

Weaver was the first to recover from his astonishment and grasp the real meaning of what had happened.

"By the Great Over Spirit!" he cried.

"This is what Hunter promised us! He has turned our vessel into a flying ship! But how, in the name of the Spirit of Light, has he done it?"

In an excited group we gathered around the motor cabin, through the window of which we could see our chief at work over his controls. After a few moments he seemed satisfied that his apparatus was running satisfactorily and looked up. For the first time he became aware of our astonished faces. He raised the door and came out on deck.

"It worked," he said simply. "Just another case of applying a knowledge we already possessed. I'll explain it all to you later. Just now we have something more important to look out for."

He turned his gaze intently upward, and wondering, we followed.

"I think perhaps we could see it better if we put out our own lights," Hunter muttered presently.

We stared at him in deeper amazement, as with this contradictory statement he turned back to the cabin. The next instant we were in total darkness, and Hunter came groping his way out among us.

We stood mutely wondering what vagary possessed our leader.

Then the silence was broken by his excited shout:

"Look up! Straight up! The Light! The queen spoke true!"

For a moment nothing struck my vision but the blackness. Then my eye focused on a little glimmering point directly overhead. A chorus of exclamations told me the others had discovered it at the same moment.

As we watched, the quivering spark grew brighter and more clear cut till it shone with a steady glow as of some great illumination at a vast distance.

Then I saw a little way from it another spark, then another and another, until suddenly the shifting curtain of mist over our heads seemed to sweep away, and we burst out under a great black dome, studded from base to zenith with millions upon millions of these points of light. But none shone as did that steady ray we had sighted first.

For a long time, it seemed, we stood there gazing aloft in speechless awe. Once only the voice of Hunter broke the silence.

"Countless worlds of light besides ours!" he exclaimed. "But it is not as I thought. They are separated from us by vast, empty space."

Again Hunter displayed his uncanny intuition, how accurate I was not to realize until later. To me, at the moment, there appeared only a myriad of tiny points of light whose meaning was beyond question.

But now I began swaying with giddiness. I looked down, thinking too much gazing aloft had caused it. In the faint light from above I could dimly see the forms of my companions. They, too, were affected. Several staggered and clutched the wall of the cabin for support.

My sensations passed quickly from mere dizziness to acute distress. I was panting as if from grueling exercise. I seemed unable to draw enough air into my lungs. My heart hammered my ribs like a broken motor. I thought my ears would burst from the pressure that seemed to pervade my whole body. Blood was spurting from my nose.

I sank to the deck, unequal longer to the mere effort of standing upright. I was conscious that one of my companions had fallen near me and lay moaning feebly.

Then I heard the voice of Hunter calling my name as from a great distance. Raising my head, I dimly saw him staggering toward the motor cabin door, supporting himself by the cabin wall.

"Scribner!" he called again. "Go down and look after the queen while I turn the ship back. There is something wrong with the air up here. We can't go on."

Though it took all my remaining strength, I managed to crawl across the deck on hands and knees and into the

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motor cabin, where Hunter had again switched on the lights, and had thrown the power off the ship's motor.

After several efforts I opened the door at the rear of the motor cabin that led back into the main cabin and the passage to the staterooms, in one of which the queen was confined.

As I threw up this door I was startled by a strong puff of air as though there had been a silent explosion within. I hesitated for an instant, but, coming to no harm, stumbled through the door, which fell shut behind me.

To my surprise breath at once came more freely. The pressure in my ears was relieved, and, though I was still weak and ill, I felt better immediately.

The queen was sulking on a rug in the corner of her stateroom, apparently in no way affected by the strange malady that had overcome the rest of us. She made no answer to my inquiry as to her condition, but when I hesitated before her for a moment to make sure that all was well with her, she leaped up and at me with the snarl of a savage young animal. I dodged back and slammed down the door just in time to escape the clutches of her small but efficient hands. My physical condition would have made me an easy victim of her rage.

Back in the motor cabin I found conditions improving, though breathing was still a little difficult. Hunter was too busy manipulating his machinery to give me more than a nod of relief, when I reported that his unruly prisoner was safe.

Worried as to the condition of our companions, whom we had left on the open deck, I ventured forth hesitatingly, but found at once that I now suffered little discomfort there. The rest, like myself, were, however, still evidently ill from their experience and greatly puzzled as to its cause. We ventured a variety of conjectures, but the consensus of opinion was that the air above the great layer of cloudy vapor, beyond which no man had ever before penetrated, was unfit for breathing, either due to lack of the accustomed vapor or to the presence in the upper region of some poisonous gas.

MEANWHILE the ship had been rushing back toward the surface of Venus with the same speed with which it had risen. The air that had beaten down upon us with hurricane velocity now rushed up around us with equal speed.

I stepped to the rail, where I found Weaver gazing fixedly over the side. A moment later we both shouted in alarm as the frozen ice field suddenly came within range of our lights immediately below.

Destruction seemed to stare us in the face. But again we reckoned without Hunter's watchfulness, for as we turned with common instinct to warn him, the motor began to whir again. Our decent was checked so abruply that we were nearly thrown from our feet.

Then we heard a rattle of tackle overhead, and, looking up, saw the great wings, that we had hitherto regarded as fantastic ornaments, unfold and spread out and begin to beat the air like those of a great bird. At once the ship began to glide forward at great speed parallel to the surface of the ice field, and presently, circling around two or three times, came to rest on the surface so gently that we felt hardly the slightest shock.

But when we sought our leader to congratulate him on the success of this first trial of his flying apparatus and to ask him eager questions as to its workings, we found him at the moment interested only in a series of jars that stood on the floor at one side of the cabin.

"I'll explain the flying machinery later," he said. "I'll instruct you, Weaver, and your two sailing mates in its handling before we start again. Just now I must find out what was the matter with the air up there. I have a fear that we may not be able to sail to those worlds above, after all. I brought these air-containers with me to test the quality of the air in the zone of darkness, thinking I might learn the cause of its absence of light.

"Just now, when I discovered while we were rising that the air was changing in quality, I began sealing up samples of it in these jars at different heights. I must know their secret at once."

As he spoke he gathered up the jars and disappeared in his laboratory. Having no invitation to follow him, we remained behind and fell to studying the mysterious mechanism that we had hitherto taken for granted as merely an improved but otherwise ordinary ship's motor. Whether Hunter had taken his mechanics into the secret to any extent, I do not know, but Weaver and I, not being of mechanical minds and having no responsibility in the direction, had not bothered our heads about it.

Accordingly we made little headway with our study now. We were about to call in one of the mechanics to test his knowledge

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when Hunter returned from his laboratory, his face clouded with disappointment.

"We will have to give up trying to reach the worlds above at present," he announced. "There is a space between us and them where there is no air to breathe."

"What!" I exclaimed, unable to grasp so preposterous a thought as a place where air was not. "How can that be?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I can only tell you that it is so. We came very near rising into that absolutely empty region. The last jar I sealed up had almost no air in it. That is why we had such difficulty in breathing. And the pressure of the air in our bodies, not balanced by pressure without, nearly burst out our ears. That, too, explains why the queen suffered no harm. The air had not yet escaped from the closed body of the ship."

"Must we, then, abandon the expedition?" asked Weaver in a tone unmistakably hopeful.

"By no means," Hunter snapped. "I still believe we can cross the region of darkness and find light lands beyond that are connected with this by at least breathable air. Now that our flying apparatus works we can try it, anyhow."

"In that case," replied our admirable sailing master with a shrug, "the sooner I learn to fly the better."

YOU may be sure that Hunter's explanation of the flying properties of his craft, though intended primarily for Weaver, his two sailing-mates, and the mechanics who had direct charge of the motors, was a matter of keen interest to us all. We crowded in and around the motor cabin and listened in awe to his account of this most marvelous invention in the annals of Venus. It was a contrivance that to our minds marked our leader as a veritable wizard of science, though he continued to maintain that he had merely exercised a little ingenuity in adapting discoveries made by men dead before his time.

I know I, for one, had been not a little piqued at his proceeding on this voyage without first explaining the details of apparatus by which he had hoped to make comparatively simple an expedition that had appeared well-nigh hopeless to us who were uninformed. I wondered, too, that he had not made use of this obvious means of escape when we were first beset by the savages.

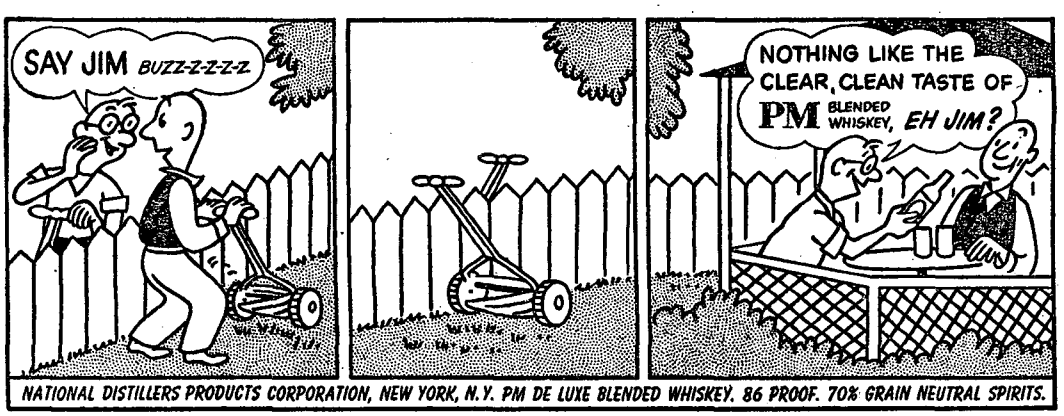
I reflected bitterly that we might then have avoided the incubus of our rebellious female passenger. My very recent escape from a mauling at the hands of that lady served in no way to lighten my grievance.

But Hunter's explanation when it came was, like all his mental processes, so fair and reasonable that I was ashamed of my pettishness.

"The means by which the ship rises from the ground are absurdly simple, once explained," he began modestly. "Had the need for flying ever before arisen, almost anyone would have hit upon this obvious device. I have simply made use of a large quantity of lifting stone, such as you have doubtless all played with as boys."

The nub of the mystery immediately became clear, though the details remained to be explained. The lifting stone was a mineral, comparatively rare in Venus, but of little value from lack of practical use. It was, nevertheless, well known on account of its peculiar property.

Left alone, it seemed no different from an ordinary piece of granite. But subjected to friction it developed immediately the property of neutralizing gravity. The greater the mass of the mineral and the more vigorous the friction applied to its surface, the more powerful became its force of repulsion.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I remember as a boy having a toy bird whose body was made of this mineral. To make it fly one had only to stroke its back a few times with a bit of cloth and release it. After the energy of this momentary friction was spent, it would come fluttering gently back on the wings of cloth that were held distended by tiny frames from its sides.

I well remember my childish grief when I rubbed the thing too hard and it disappeared in a flash, never to be found again, though I spent several sleeps hunting the neighborhood for it.

Hunter had simply made of his ship a toy flying-bird on a huge scale. Between the roof and ceiling of the cabins he had installed a big amalgam cylinder made of bits of this flying stone. Around this cylinder was a revolving metal jacket, its interior lined with steel brushes in contact with the cylinder. This jacket was attached to the ship's motor and when made to revolve the resulting friction started the stone to lifting with rapidly increasing power.

The great wings, when spread flat, suffered the ship to glide down gently, or, when worked up and down in imitation of real bird's wings, drove the vessel forward rapidly at any height to which the stone cylinder held it.

"I was forced to do all my experimenting in my laboratory with small models," the inventor went on. "I knew that if I tried flying a large vessel in the open I would be deemed more crazy than ever and that probably none of you would risk your lives with me. I did not wish, moreover, to raise false hopes by trying to explain the device till I had proved it. Moreover," he added naïvely, "I enjoyed giving you the novelty of surprise.

"You are probably wondering why I didn't use it to escape the savages in the first place. I intended and hoped to do so up to the moment when Weaver and Scribner dragged me away from the ship as our blind foes were about to board it. The motor had become jammed in our tussle with the ice, however, and I was not able to get it clear in time."

Again our confidence in our leader was renewed, and when he put it to vote as to whether we should continue across the zone of darkness or turn back toward home, not a voice was raised against going on with our enterprise. I noted with satisfaction that our erstwhile grumbling sailing-master led the chorus of endorsement. The bluff sailor had been taught a new trick, the art of flying, and he was all eagerness to try his knowledge.

So as soon as Hunter and his mechanics had made certain that the motor and flying tackle were properly tuned, we rose again from the ice, no longer fearing closed channels, ice-mountains, or obstructing bodies of land.

The lifting cylinder was now regulated so that we remained at a safe distance from the surface and still kept it within range of our lights so that we could study the nature of the country as we proceeded. The great wings drove us forward at a surprising pace, we soon became accustomed to this new sensation of flying, and before the first sleep of our renewed journey had ended, we were as much at home in the air as we had been on the surface of the sea.

Aside from the novelty of flight, however, our voyage had become most monotonous. The unvarying white of the surface below us, broken in contour only by an occasional low ridge of hills, was even more unchanging than the surface of the Land of Light. We saw no more signs of human habitation, the only life in evidence being an occasional shaggy beast like the one we had seen slain by the savages, or now and then a flock of wild birds. Twice we passed through brief storms, but the weather was mainly calm and misty.

We had merely exchanged one Land of Never Change for another.

Our spirits were buoyed up, however, by the momentary expectation of coming to an end of this phase, and finding still further adventure in the beyond.

Only one thing marred the satisfaction of our leader, as he confided to me during the second sleep. That was the unbroken obduracy of the queen. She continued to sulk in confinement, refusing food, and offering to attack anyone who attempted to approach her.

For my part, her state of mind troubled me little so long as she was in safe-keeping. But to Hunter, I could see, it was a personal matter over which he brooded deeply.

On the third sleep he determined, much against the judgment of the rest of us, to try giving her the freedom of the ship. I had as soon have contemplated the approach of another collision with an ice-mountain.

But the test proved how little we could count on the vagaries of this new type of woman. After explaining carefully to her through the closed door that she was to

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have her freedom and that no harm would come to her, Hunter, accompanied by Weaver and myself, threw open her stateroom.

We were prepared for a scrimmage, and Hunter was armed for it with an anesthetic sprayer. But we might have spared our apprehensions. With head erect and face cold with disdain, she walked out, and passed us with a high assumption of queenliness. Without a glance at us, she passed through the cabin up to the deck.

WE followed in time to see her reach the ship's rail and make as if to leap over. We rushed forward, all three, with a united cry of warning. But it was not needed. For a moment she leaned over the barrier in horrid fascination at the unexpected sight of our vessel gliding forward in midair. Whether it was a resurgence of her civilized, ancestral blood, or whether she had become so inured to the unexpected marvels within the power of her new-found cousin that she could not longer feel an acute shock of surprise, I do not know. But when at last she turned around, her face was as calm and expressionless as though carved from her native ice.

"Now you may bring me food," she said quietly. It was not an appeal nor even a request. It was unmistakably a command. The truth seemed to have dawned on her that among male mortals with two normal eyes each, she had no need of physical force or display of barbaric rage to enforce her will.

If anyone resented her tone, he did not betray the fact. Her command was obeyed as, I blush to confess, were all subsequent mandates of hers.

Hunter remained head of the expedition. Weaver continued to direct the handling of the ship. But from that moment forth the queen ruled us all, such was the sheer power of her beauty and the fascination of her strange personality.

We all marveled greatly at her ready adaptability to her new surroundings, once she had made up her mind to accept them as inevitable. Gifted with native gracefulness, as who could fail to be, having Hunter blood, she began quickly to drop the uncouthness acquired during her savage up-bringing. She had a natural passion for personal cleanliness, and once granted the facilities for gratifying it, she pursued it to the point of fastidiousness. She soon demanded civilized garb.

Our food at first did not appeal to her untrained taste, but she readily acquired a most healthy appetite for it and by sedulous imitation learned to use our unfamiliar eating utensils most gracefully. The tones of her voice, even, became less harsh, and she began after a little to lose her guttural accent.

And with all these new accomplishments she grew steadily more dangerous.

The dominant trait of her character reminded me strongly, by sharp contrast, of the First Lady of the South. Never were two women more unusual, more revolutionary in their views as to woman's place in society, nor were there ever two more diametrically opposed to each other in those views.

The lady's cardinal principle was that woman's place was in the home and with its duties, that she should be subservient to man, and at the same time supported and protected by him. The queen held that woman was the ruler, the leader in public affairs, and that man was destined to do the menial work of life under her direction.

The one was clinging, persuasive; the other dominant, driving.

These tendencies of the queen, acquired from her lifelong habit of ruling her subservient, blind serfs, manifested themselves in a hundred little instances. She blandly ignored the obligation the rest of us felt to keep our own staterooms clean and orderly and to do our share in preparing meals, but saw to it that those items were scrupulously attended to for her by the rest of us. On the other hand, she was tireless in mastering the details of managing the ship and was forever in the way of Hunter and Weaver.

I spoke to Hunter once of this sharp contrast between the two women, who occupied such momentous places in his life. He answered me rather shortly, though good-naturedly enough, with the manner of one who would appear to make light of that which secretly lay heavy on his mind. Watching his face afterward I satisfied myself that he was by no means blind to the weight of my observation.

It turned out that the queen was the first to announce our approach to what appeared to be the long-looked-for goal of our hazardous voyage.

It was toward the close of the twentieth sleep of our monotonous flight. Hunter had the watch at the time, and the queen, as usual, persisted in actively sharing it with him. In this case, it seemed to me, she was taking a more active interest than

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he in the ship's run. He had become moody and distraught of late and now for moments at a time seemed lost in his brooding thoughts.

The queen, on the contrary, was all alertness, now noting the working of the machinery, now scanning the landscape below us and keeping up a running fire of comment on such scant features as it presented, and now standing in the lookout-box in the prow, her keen eyes piercing the darkness ahead as it dissolved under our powerful lights.

"Stop! Stop!" she called out suddenly from the lookout-box. "There's something ahead!"

The man beside her, who had been properly stationed as lookout, stared at her in surprise. He had seen nothing. Hunter, who rushed forward at the cry, was equally mystified and evidently irritated. From my position amidship I could of course, make out nothing.

But meantime the mechanic in charge of the motor had involuntarily obeyed the sharp command without waiting for proper authority. The wings swung into a vertical position. The ship leaped up sharply, then settled back, and hung motionless a hundred paces or so above the ground.

"What is it?" demanded Hunter. "What did you think you saw?"

"I saw what I see, my cousin," she replied serenely. "The darkness ahead is turning white as if it were a great wall of ice."

"I see nothing!" he snorted. "But lest your eyes prove sharper than mine, we will go ahead slowly. I want no more collisions."

He gave the order, and under slowly beating wings we crept ahead, pace by pace. For some moments the rest of us saw nothing, though the queen continued to point ahead and declaim excitedly.

But, in the end, she proved right, though what she saw was no ice wall. It gradually seemed that our lights ahead were defined less sharply against the darkness, then that they faded out to soft gray, but extended an immeasurable distance farther than had been their wont.

"There is light ahead! There is light ahead! Shut off the ship's lights so we can see it!" Hunter cried out excitedly.

The blazing glare from the vessel winked out and at the same instant a chorus of wonder and relief broke from our lips.

Along the whole horizon ahead of us as far as eye could reach either way, was a low band of soft, gray light that even as we watched rose and grew in intensity until its subdued, insinuating radiance revealed our rapt faces to each other.

We were witnessing the first dawn in Venus!

CHAPTER V

A GREAT REVELATION

"IT IS the goal!" Hunter whispered at last. "The new Land of Light beyond the Circle of Darkness!"

He was pale and trembling with emotion. And all the rest of our company were visibly overcome with awe by this climax of our strenuous, blind venture.

I say all: I must except the queen. Her emotions were quite different. There was nothing of awe in her countenance as she turned to Hunter, her vivid face alight with excitement.

"I thank you now, my cousin, for bringing me with you. At last I am to be queen over a land of light!"

It served as a rude awakening from our solemn mood, a crude anticlimax, as though a wave of icy water had swept over the group.

Several laughed; then checked themselves nervously. Others glared in anger. Hunter eyed her blankly; then turned away without a word.

I have never slain a woman. I may say for myself with due modesty that I have never on cool reflection greatly desired to do so. But I swear that had some less finicky person undertaken the task at that moment, I would hardly have had the heart to stay his hand.

But the irritation of this jarring interruption passed quickly in wonder at the glorious panorama unfolding before us. Steadily, the light grew. We no longer needed the blaze of illumination from the ship's lamps.

And now we saw that the surface of Venus over which we sailed was changing character. We had passed out over a great expanse of water again, and water no longer bridged over by an ice flooring. Such ice as it contained was in detached fragments, now and then a considerable floe, here and there an ice mountain, but resolving more and more into mere drifting bits.

At length, all signs of ice had disappeared, and below us lay only a vast, limitless field of open water. The air that blew about us was becoming more and more balmy. Our heavy garments grew irk-

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some and we began shedding them one by one.

Familiar sea-fowl flew about the vessel. And, most gratifying to behold, they had normal eyes.

In every respect, the sea below us, the mellow air about us, and the soft, gray sky above, were the same as we had left behind when we entered the Zone of Darkness.

Weaver now brought the ship down to the surface of the sea, and it once more assumed the character of an ordinary vessel. This manner of progress was much less rapid, but it was more saving of the machinery and the chemical supplies for driving it.

But welcome as was the discovery of light and warmth, we began soon to yearn for something more substantial than a watery realm. A region of limitless fluidity, however salubrious its climate, had little colonizing value to the overcrowded population of Venus.

Sleep after sleep passed, however, and no land hove in sight, though our lookouts gave to the search for it the same vigilance they had used in watching for the first signs of the new light.

As before, the queen was again one of the most eager of watchers. She was, likewise, more than ever obsessed with a sense of authority and importance, having discerned the light so far ahead of the rest of us. There was stirred up by her attitude an almost childish spirit of emulation among the men.

There seemed to be a tacit determination that, come what might, this domineering lady should not score a second triumph over us. The members of each watch, therefore, vied with each other in intentness, even to the extent of cutting short their sleep lest someone give the cry of "Land ahead!" when they were not on deck to share the discovery.

So for thirty sleeps we sailed over this empty, silent sea.

Three separate times we were thrown into a pitch of excitement by false hopes of land, begotten of low-lying mist banks, that soon dissipated again.

But, at length, in the middle of the thirty-first sleep, while the queen, as luck would have it, was for a brief time below decks, Tanner, stationed in the lookout-box, sighted a low-lying coast dead ahead, which quickly proved itself to all of us to be more substantial than the mist.

With the first cry, those who were off watch rushed on deck. We behaved like madmen in our joy, rushing about, shouting and singing and sounding the praise of our leader, whose great vision was about to prove true in every detail.

The queen came on deck in the midst of our jubilation and was most evidently disgruntled at finding that she had been defeated this time.

With almost breathless eagerness our whole company crowded against the forward rails and intently scanned the approaching shore to learn as quickly as possible what manner of country we were about to invade.

Nearer and nearer it drew. Land birds began to fly over us. We caught the scent of verdure now and then over the tang of the sea air and were rejoiced to know that we were not approaching a desert country.

Since first sighting this coast, it had remained partly shrouded behind a thin sea haze which prevented our determining much of its character, excepting that it was low and level and seemed to have few indentations.

But presently the water rippled under a sudden puff of wind. The mist curtain wavered and broke into curling eddies of clouds that in a moment had altogether dissipated and left the strange coast clear-cut before us.

At that a chorus of involuntary exclamations arose from our company. They expressed a mixture of surprise, pleasure, and regret.

I do not know that any of us had definitely thought of the possibility that this land to which we all looked forward so eagerly might already be preempted to the full by intelligent beings like ourselves. Certainly it was reasonable enough that it should be. But, at any rate, I think we had all more or less unconsciously assumed that we were to take possession of a rich but uninhabited territory.

Hence our surprise and regret, mingled with somewhat inconsistent pleasure, when the shifting of the mist revealed a land covered as far as the eye could reach in every direction with familiar pyramid-shaped buildings, such as we last saw as we sailed from our home port so many sleeps away.

Directly ahead was a port, crowded with great piers and basins. Huge warehouses lined its shores. At either side of the port long rows of houses, evidently dwellings surrounded by gardens, extended away till they faded from sight in the distance. Here and there at long intervals were tall signal towers like those in our Land of

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Light. Small boats, familiar in form, plied the offshore waters, and as we looked a great ship put out, a ship in many details like our own familiar merchantmen.

Hunter, who stood near me, sighed deeply.

"I don't know why I expected an empty land. Why should this not be inhabited? But I am amazed that it is peopled with beings evidently like us in development. Certainly there could never have been communication between our lands."

"If this be a sample of this new world," I ventured, "I see little hope that any of our overcrowded population can find refuge here."

"I fear not," he agreed.

It was evident that his interest in finding another new people was outweighed by disappointment at the knowledge that his quest for an unclaimed land was as yet unfulfilled.

AT THAT moment Weaver, who had mounted the lookout-box for a nearer view, returned to us. The moment I got a square view of his face I knew there was something amiss. Hunter, too, caught the look, and eyed him apprehensively.

"What do you make of it, Weaver?" he asked.

The shipmaster looked our leader in the face for a long moment without replying. I thought I read in his eyes mingled pity and embarrassment. Then, still without a word, he turned away again and studied the approaching shore.

"In the Over Spirit's name! What is it, Weaver?" cried Hunter.

Weaver replied haltingly, without turning his head our way:

"See those two nearest signal-towers? Note their position. See that longest pier projecting just halfway between? See that light off to the right of the harbor-mouth? See that small stream flowing into the sea at the left?

"Do those landmarks mean nothing to you? Even in this world of eternal sameness, I could not mistake them. You have both seen them before. I have sailed into this roadstead a hundred times, if once.

"I am loath to say it, Hunter, but 'tis no new land we see. Something has gone awry with our calculations. We have returned to our own Land of Light. This is the harbor of West Venus before us."

We stared at our shipmaster in amazement. Had he taken leave of his senses?

But he continued to point at the approaching harbor.

"Look and convince yourselves," he said.

I had visited West Venus twice, once in my early youth and once not long ago. Hunter had been there at least once to my knowledge. We shook ourselves from the daze of Weaver's revelation and endeavored to recall our impressions of the place. It took some moments for us to convince ourselves that the shipmaster was not suffering from a hallucination, but in the end we were so convinced beyond the slightest doubt.

But once having made sure that we were now about to touch at the extreme western shore of the great continental mass of the Land of Light, on the side directly opposite to the one from which we sailed, the mystery remained as to how we could have come there. Our guiding instruments, I knew, from such record of our course as I had obtained from time to time through Hunter or Weaver, showed that we had apparently held a straight course due east from our home port of East Venus, throughout the whole period of our voyage.

I had only the vaguest theoretical knowledge of the science of nautical reckonings. To me, in my ignorance, it seemed possible nature might be so altered that our instruments had misled us. We might then, instead of crossing the darkness as we supposed, have merely skirted its inner edge in a great half-circle, emerging by accident on the opposite side of our continent.

When I advanced this idea, however, Hunter dismissed it as out of the question.

"No," he declared. "The mystery lies deeper. We have two sets of guiding instruments, based on entirely different principles. They have agreed throughout our course, a thing that would not be likely were the laws of nature upset."

So I stood by, a curious but useless spectator, while Hunter and Weaver checked back over the records of the voyage. We had slipped down to Hunter's cabin together, without a word to the others of our momentous discovery. Even the usually vigilant queen was so intent on studying the new marvels out across the water that she hardly noticed our departure.

At length Hunter arose from his computations and stared thoughtfully at his plaster model of the Land of Light. Suddenly, with an exclamation of disgust, he kicked the model with such force that the fragile affair broke into a dozen fragments.

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"So perish an age-old error!" he exclaimed. "That model and all its like are of no more use to the scholars of Venus. Our Venus is not a hill of light in a sea of darkness, as we supposed. It is a great ball floating in an open space—one half light, the other half dark. We have held a straight easterly course, just as we supposed, and we have sailed entirely around our Venus! Men! Men! We have made the greatest discovery of the ages! Our world is no longer a mystery!

"Best of all, we have proved that there are also other worlds as I had dreamed, only different. They are not connected with our Land of Light, as I thought, but float detached from us out in empty space. We have seen them with our own eyes, worlds without end! And we have the means to reach them. We'll start again as soon as I can alter our ship so as to sail in the airless spaces between worlds.

"The people of Venus need no longer fear overcrowding! We are the saviors of our race! The universe lies open at our very doors!"

THAT is a true saying I have read recently in one of your sacred Earth books: "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country."

Our revered leader, Hunter, was a notable exemplar of its wisdom. The treatment accorded him by his own people, even, I regret to say, by some of the very company that had so heroically attended his wanderings, is evidence that human nature, in this respect at least, differs little between Venus and Earth.

Our leader had sailed away under a cloud of universal disapproval and unbelief, shared even by us, whose personal devotion and zest for adventure had caused us to accompany him against our saner judgment. He returned with a tale of achievement, to the popular mind more insane and preposterous by far than the prophecy with which he set sail, and added to that a new prophecy that staggered the imagination.

That he was received with almost universal incredulity, I believe proved the greatest surprise and grief of his life. He had fully expected the evidence he offered as to his momentous discoveries to convince even those who had been most skeptical.

He had been confident of reinstatement as a popular hero with a greatly added prestige.

But on the contrary, where he had left behind him incredulity tinged with pity and affection, he returned to find not only disbelief but animosity, a quite general conviction that having failed in his quest, he had turned charlatan and was attempting to impose a colossal falsehood upon the world.

His first taste of this had come to him when he called the rest of the ship's company together after convincing Weaver and myself, and unfolded to them his discovery. They had by now learned the truth as to our whereabouts, and assembled in the main cabin at Hunter's call, muttering among themselves and casting dubious glances in his direction.

His explanations they received for the most part in silence. At the end a few asked eager questions and were apparently convinced. The queries of others were put with covert sneers. The rest maintained significant silence.

From remarks I overheard as our meeting broke up, I gathered that the disaffected ones thought they had been made dupes. They had, they held, been put to great stress of mind and body for a long period when all the time, light, warmth, and safety lay but a scant sleep away, and all that a vainglorious adventure might win false fame and delude the world with false notions and false hopes. To their minds the man they had revered and trusted and followed had proved himself utterly unworthy. Their loyalty was at an end.

This division of faith and opinion among his followers later proved fuel to the fire of popular distrust.

While the harbor pilot was putting out to escort us ashore I had prepared a brief summary of our report which I signaled from our masthead to the nearest tower. By the time we set foot ashore, the news was on its way over all the Land of Light and was being posted on the city's street bulletins.

Accordingly, the streets greeted us with a throng as great as had watched our departure from East Venus. Everywhere, I noted signs of animosity as we made our way through the crush to a street boat. There was everywhere through the throng the jangling of acrimonious controversy. The shouts that reached our ears made it all too evident that the unbelievers outnumbered our friends.

We did not know till afterward that the director of the chief college of West Venus happened to be among the first to read my bulletin and to misinterpret its meager ex-

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planations. Being a man given to hasty actions, he had immediately caused to be posted under it a statement by himself denouncing the account as an outrageous fraud. This man had once had a controversy with Hunter's father, the Chief Patriarch, and his conduct was animated not a little by spleen.

I will do the man justice to add that he afterward was convinced of Hunter's truthfulness, on going over his complete records, and apologized publicly.

The mischief was done, however, for the denial of this high authority reached the people at the same time as my original statement and they felt fully confirmed in their natural tendency to be skeptical, and highly resentful at what they believed was an attempt at a general swindle.

But, of course, no one interfered with our progress, and we arrived shortly at the leading travelers' home and engaged apartments for a brief rest and an opportunity to prepare a fuller statement before proceeding around to East Venus.

Here we were shortly waited upon by the local Patriarch. He accorded us a polite but rather frigid welcome and intimated before he left that the first accounts of our voyage were doubtless distorted through haste and that he would await with interest our official statement.

By this time Hunter was in a sullen rage, a state of mind that hardly left him for a moment during the remainder of our stay on Venus.

For some sleeps we remained here, working over the records of our voyage and receiving a vast number of visitors, some friendly disposed, but more having a manner of veiled hostility and evidently impelled to call on us only by curiosity.

No small part of this curiosity was directed at the mysterious queen. Many a notable who called gave his chief attention to this lady, and I was disturbed to note the strong impression made upon all by her unusual beauty and her childlike interest in her new surroundings. I had at first supposed that her imperial designs had been abandoned in the face of the vast complications of this world, so new to her that for the moment even she was overawed.

But I was presently filled with uneasiness as I noted again the readiness with which she adapted herself to her new surroundings, the intelligence and trend of her innumerable questions, and the quickness with which she absorbed new knowledge.

She was greatly impressed by the fact that our broad continent, with its great wealth and millions of population, had no rulers and no laws, but was merely controlled in its social life by a set of age-old customs. To her, used to absolute authority over such world as she knew, this state of affairs was unthinkable. The trend of her questions soon convinced me that she saw here a great opportunity to supply what was to her mind an obvious lack.

"I am told," she exclaimed to me, "that this wonderful land of yours has not changed in hundreds of ages! That should not be. In my Land of Darkness I was constantly changing things, building new and larger and better dwellings. But I had so little opportunity. Here, there is endless opportunity. They need someone to rule over them and make them change their ways."

Another observation of mine added to my uneasiness. The disaffected ones of our ship's company had left us at the pier with scant ceremony and gone their several ways, presumably back to their homes. But as I went about my rounds through the city, renewing my professional relations with public affairs, I ran across different ones of this group here and there. Without any particular reason, I felt their tarrying near our leader boded no good to him. A little later, I had reason for this fear.

ONCE, as I was leaving the chief market place, I saw the queen, accompanied by her two blind slaves, turn into a side street. A gaping crowd followed at respectful distance. I followed out of curiosity, and presently saw her joined by Tanner, who of all our ship's company had been most outspoken in his opposition to Hunter at the last.

A little way down the street the quartet turned into a travelers' home. Feeling it my duty to look into this strange proceeding, I withdrew to a convenient doorway and watched unseen.

Presently, one after another, every one of the opponents of Hunter who had formerly been of our ship's company arrived and entered this travelers' home.

It was evidently a prearranged meeting. There was conspiracy on foot.

I realized now, as I thought back over recent happenings, that since our arrival the queen, though apparently on the best of terms with all our party, Hunter in particular, had never at any time expressed to a caller any faith in his tale of a

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round Venus, and of worlds beyond the sky. She had always avoided discussion by declaring that she knew too little of such things. Moreover, she had developed the habit of spending much time going about the city alone, save for her two blind slaves, who were always with her. Evidently she had not been bent on excursions of mere curiosity.

Putting these circumstances together, I came to the conclusion that the queen was plotting for power through the medium of Hunter's enemies. Her threat to rule in the Land of Light had been meant as no childish boast.

While I had no idea at the moment that Hunter's ambitious cousin could make any real headway with such an absurd scheme, I realized at the same time that she might develop enough influence to create no end of trouble. I felt it my duty to go at once to Hunter and put him on his guard.

But on my way back to our lodgings I witnessed an act of a drama that for the moment drove out of my mind all thoughts of the apparently petty machinations of the queen.

It had to do with that other female nemesis of our leader, the Lady of the South. An astounding sequel it proved to the matter that sent me on my late journey to her home and had made a profound impression on my mind before it had been submerged by the more momentous affair of Hunter's expedition.

I had just rounded the corner into the market-place again when I was startled by a clanging of gongs and an uproar of many excited voices. Out across the square opposite me poured an excited throng.

At first I saw only the mingling of drab and white of the usual crowd of men and women. But as I ran across the square for nearer view, an array of brilliant color burst from the center of the seething human mass. A long file of women, arrayed in shimmering robes of many hues, marching four abreast in tune to the clamorous gong-beats, pushed out into the open.

Even before I read the inscriptions on the many banners they bore triumphantly above their heads, I had a premonition that this demonstration had to do with the First Lady of the South. Never but once before had I seen garments such as were worn by these women. Each was a counterpart of the alluring robe in which the Lady was arrayed when I had interviewed her.

The lettering on the leading banner confirmed my impression:

"Our leader, the First Lady of the South," it read.

"Let men direct the world. We will rear its children," ran another.

"Woman's place is in the home. Man must support that home," was a third maxim.

"We will love whom we choose, without fear of clan," and so on down the line, which I should judge was some twenty thousand strong.

I was astounded. Here was evidence that the repulsive and revolutionary ideas of the daughter of the Patriarch of the South, had, during our long absence in the darkness, won a large following. She had made good her boast far beyond my most pessimistic forebodings.

After seeing the last of this strange procession, I hurried to the nearest signal tower to turn in a report of what I had witnessed. I might have spared myself the pains. The report was already spread on its bulletin-board and with it statements from all parts of the Land of Light, and all of a most alarming nature.

In every center in the Land of Light there had been, simultaneously, a feminine demonstration like the one I had witnessed. The women of Venus, almost in a body had refused to do any further work outside their homes. Wives had refused to live with their husbands until they agreed to these terms. Women not yet married had pledged themselves to marry only for love and regardless of clan, and then only to mate with men who would agree to support them.

Of a truth, our World of Never Change, once having tasted the passion for alteration, was indulging it to the full.

And he who had been among the first prophets of change must needs now stand by, discredited as a leader, a mere spectator of change far different than he would have had, nay, rather that he had been willing to sacrifice his life to avert.

I LOST no time now in returning to Hunter and acquainting him with what I had learned. To my surprise I found him making hasty preparations for departure.

"We sail for East Venus at once," he announced as I entered the apartment. "I have a message from my father. He needs me with him. The world is in a turmoil, and I must be at his side, though I fear my present disfavor with the people will render me of little use. I may be able to help him in another way, however."

"You have heard, then, of the revolt of

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the Lady of the South?" I asked. "I saw the parade here and read the bulletins. I came to tell you."

"Yes, my father's message told me. And I have another important message which I will confide to you. In it I see a possible way of saving the society of Venus from destruction."

He paced the floor in his agitation.

"Change! Change, indeed!" he went on. "I wanted change. I thought by discovering new worlds and introducing new ideas, something new to work for, I could save our world from rot. Then, even as I planned my venture, I realized suddenly that the world was awaking. It would soon of itself demand change. I hoped to provide healthy channels for this restlessness, but I was too late. Change has overwhelmed us! But it is the wrong change! It had already found its nervous outlet. But read that. Perhaps by sacrificing myself, I may yet arrest this madness."

He handed me a tablet newly arrived from the signal service. It was from the Lady of the South, and was couched in shamelessly endearing terms. It began by saying that she had read of Hunter's return and of his great discoveries. She assured him of her absolute faith in the truth of his statements and declared that he could count on her support against all the world. But of most significance was the closing paragraph:

. . . And by the time this message reaches you, my dearest friend and sweetheart, I will be in a position really to help you with my moral support. For I know, dear one, that despite your ancient prejudices, you are in truth my sweetheart. I read it in your eyes that time so long ago when I offered you myself as mate and wife, and you refused because of the customs of Venus. But I have planned to overthrow those customs. My plans are well-laid. The women are with me. By the time this reaches you, those chains of custom will be thrown off forever. We will be free to follow our love, and wed. Come to me at once.

I looked up, aghast at the shamelessness of the sender of this message. But if Hunter had felt this same repugnance, he no longer showed it in his face. There was rather in his expression something like puzzled tenderness.

"There can be no doubt that she loves me," he mused. "And I—I have always believed love could come only with the affection of married life which could not exist except between those of the same blood and clan. And yet—she moves me strangely. Can it be that I love her, as she says? Scribner, tell me, can a man love two women at once?"

I gasped in astonishment. It was some moments before I could give him my utterly futile reply.

"I know nothing about this thing called love, my poor friend," was all I could say.

"Nor I, I'm afraid," he sighed. "I feel that I know less of it at this moment than ever before. Once I fled the Land of Light to escape this lady because she appealed to me so strongly that I feared for the strength of my own resolutions. Then I met the queen, my kinswoman, a most proper mate for me, and I felt for her the same emotions that the Lady of the South had aroused For the time, I thought I had been cured of the infatuation I had felt for the other. But now, I confess, she has set it aflame again.

"But the worst of it all is, I have already given the queen to understand that I will wed her. Was ever a man so beset?"

He faced me, a very image of woe, the appeal in his eyes bidding me settle the vexatious question.

"As for the queen," I said, "I think she has already settled that matter for you." Then I told of the evidence of her disloyalty that I had just gathered.

"So much for the queen," I added. "As for this Lady of the South, I can only appeal to the ancient customs of Venus to guide you. You should be the last to yield to this outrageous demand on the part of the temporarily insane women of our land."

But my advice, I could see, weighed little with him. The information preceding it, however, seemed to lift a great load from his mind.

"Scribner!" he exclaimed. "Your news has solved my problem. I am under no obligation to my treacherous cousin. I think, then, I can save Venus from this menace. I will marry the Lady of the South, and take her away from Venus. Without her, this revolt will die a natural death."

I was so stunned by his totally unexpected decision that I could have made no reply even had his manner indicated that he expected further counsel. But evidently the decision was irrevocable, and I was saved the embarrassment of comment by the arrival at that moment of the porters who were to take our baggage to the ship.

We departed immediately afterward and proceeded to the pier in silence, he evidently preoccupied with his plans and

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I too much disturbed by this latest turn of affairs to give thought to anything else.

The rest of the ship's company had been summoned before I had returned to our apartments, and were already aboard. Our baggage had arrived ahead of us.

Under Hunter's orders, that there might be no delay, the vessel had cast off from the pier and lay awaiting us in midchannel. A small boat was ready at the pier to take us to the ship.

We were hurrying down the pier toward the boat when we heard behind us a wild outcry and the thudding of many feet. We stopped and looked back.

Such bystanders, workmen, and sailors as had been about were scattering in every direction with cries of terror. And no wonder! The cause was such as had never before been seen in our peaceful world, though for a moment it transported Hunter and myself back to our adventurous surroundings in the Land of Darkness.

Sweeping all before them, there charged straight at us a most warlike band. The queen, flanked by her two eyeless retainers, led a company of some fifty men, all, like herself and her slaves, armed with the short, deadly spears that had struck such terror to our hearts when we had faced them in savage hands in the Land of Darkness.

TO ADD to the grotesque savagery of the spectacle, each wore over his mouth and nose one of the protecting masks Hunter had used to prevent himself from being affected when employing his anesthetic spray to overcome the savages.

In a flash it was evident that the queen had perfected her conspiracy, and intended to start activities by making Hunter and his friends prisoners. Had she learned or suspected that her cousin did not, after all, intend to wed her, and proposed to force him into the married state? Or—was murder her object?

She had evidently planned thoroughly, and guarded even against his potent anesthetic sprayer, a precaution she could have spared, for it had never occurred to Hunter to go thus armed in the supposed security of the Land of Light.

But we tarried no longer to consider this amazing outbreak. It was apparent to both of us on the instant that we could not get aboard ship too soon.

We whirled about again, and ran as I had never run before in my life. We shouted to our waiting boatmen to start their motor and cast off. We leaped from the pier across a gap already a pace wide, and fell, sprawling, in the center of the boat.

The motor-driver at the same instant threw the power to full speed, and the craft leaped out into the open water.

We were not an instant too quick. As our feet let the pier, the queen, some paces in the lead of her retainers, dashed up to the landing. With a savage snarl of baffled rage, all her newly acquired civilization for the moment forgotten, she let drive her spear with such force and accuracy that it struck upright in the bottom of our boat, scarce a hand's breadth from Hunter's body.

Fortunate indeed it was that our departure had been unexpected. Otherwise the queen would have had the pier guarded, and this tale would have had quite another ending.

As it was, our pursuers seized another small boat that proved faster than ours, and gave us such a close chase that we barely made the ship in time. But once aboard, our big vessel swiftly gathered way and left them behind.

During the first stretch of our voyage almost nothing was discussed aboard the ship but this amazing outbreak of the queen and the appalling world-wide revolt headed by the Lady of the South. But it never occurred to us that there could at any time be any comparison in magnitude between their activities. Having escaped her savage spears, we could afford to laugh at the puny exhibition of rage by the queen with her handful of followers. Force could gain no headway, we felt sure, in the civilized environments of Venus.

But the world-wide mortal onslaught of the Lady was no laughing matter. And we were sailing directly into that Lady's power, for Hunter proposed to return home by way of South Venus, and pick up the Lady on the way. He determined to see his father before finally leaving Venus, and convince him that his revolutionary conduct was the only possible way of saving the order of Venus.

Hunter had intended to make use of his ship's flying apparatus, and thus hasten the voyage as much as possible. But the long strain to the vessel's machinery, and the impromptu repairing it had received in the Land of Darkness, had left a flaw in a vital part of the motor that the mechanics had not discovered while overhauling it in West Venus.

We were compelled, therefore, at a time when speed was most important, to limp

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along for twenty sleeps over a course that, with our flying device in order, should have been accomplished in one. We were all the more distressed at this delay in view of our fear that the queen and her followers might possibly seize a ship and overhaul us.

But no such catastrophe occurred, and on the twentieth sleep, just as the mechanics had put the lifting gear once more in order, we sighted South Venus, and presently were waiting off the roadstead for the harbor guide.

But when that official arrived, the astounding news he brought instantly changed our plans and banished our delusions as to the minor nature of the queen's activities.

MOMENTOUS history had been made in Venus while we drifted idly at sea. With the disaffected members of Hunter's company and a few of their friends as a nucleus, whom she had charmed by her beauty and cleverness into abject obedience to herself, the queen had organized a counter-revolt among the men against the strike of the women under the Lady of the South.

Force and absolute authority were a matter of course to the queen, and she had converted her enthralled followers to believe that its use under her was a sure way of bringing their rebelious women to time. Her opponents, unable to conceive of such a thing as force, made no attempt to resist her little army.

Following her first foray, in which they had nearly captured Hunter and myself, they had taken possession of a big cutlery works in West Venus, and compelled the workers to manufacture spears by the thousand.

Meantime other recruits rallied to her until she had a good-sized force under arms. She had subjected West Venus with hardly a show of resistance, driven the women back to work at the spear-point, made the Patriarch a prisoner in his palace, and set up an absolute government in his own council chamber, compelling him to furnish to her council whatever information was necessary for the guidance of the new state.

Leaving a viceroy in charge of conquered West Venus, she had marched overland diagonally across the continent upon South Venus at the head of her army, arriving there five sleeps ahead of us.

There the Lady of the South, driven desperate by danger, had attempted to meet force by force. Hastily organizing her women into an army provided only with clubs, they had met the queen's force, and had been routed with considerable slaughter, the first bloody battle in the history of Venus.

The Lady, with her disrupted rabble of women, was now in full flight along the main canal for East Venus, hoping to win protection from reenforcements there, but hotly pursued by the queen and her men.

The queen had publicly announced on her way through South Venus that she proposed to kill the Lady as soon as she caught her. She would then move on to East Venus and capture the chief Patriarch, and hold him as hostage until his son, Hunter, should give himself up and redeem his promise to marry her.

The last news of her had come through three sleeps before. By now, her dire threats may have been accomplished.

Thus, while he had drifted helplessly at sea in a disabled ship, had been demolished Hunter's dream of saving Venus by sacrificing himself and removing from the planet the Lady of the South, whom he had deemed the world's one great menace.

The Lady was to be removed, perhaps had been removed, by one who was a far greater menace than she. Hunter had only the ignominious choice of saving his life by sacrificing his father, or by giving himself up to become husband and accomplice of this tyrant.

In either event he would add to the ignominy of his supposed attempt to hoax this populace, the real reproach of having been the means of foisting this female monster upon them.

I knew Hunter too well to doubt which horn of this dilemma he would seize. It was not in his nature to seek physical safety at the expense of others, least of all of his revered father.

This foregone conclusion had barely entered my mind when he gave Weaver the order to throw the ship into the air and fly to East Venus at all possible speed. He left a message to be forwarded to his father that he was coming.

During our brief trip I had little to say to our leader, because there was little I could say. Again and again I went over the situation from every angle, in vain search for a loophole of escape.

The plan by which he had hoped to remove the menace of the Lady of the South manifestly would not work with the queen. There had been method in her study of the flying-ship. There would be

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no hope of luring her aboard a second time and kidnaping her. She would control the vessel once we surrendered, and surrender we must without condition or hope of escape, or the life of the Chief Patriarch would be forfeited.

As for the simple tricks with anesthetics by which she had been foiled before, she was now thoroughly on her guard against them.

To you of Earth, familiar with tragedy, one obvious solution would have occurred —murder of the queen; failing that, suicide with honor, perhaps both.

But such tragic methods were undreamed of in Venus, and such a thought never occurred to me, nor could I have dreamed that Hunter had such a solution in mind.

So in the spirit of utter despair we approached South Venus.

The old familiar harbor looked so peaceful as we approached, that for a moment we hoped the marauding band had not yet arrived.

But we were quickly undeceived. Our vessel had scarce settled down to the surface of the harbor when a boat shot out from a pier and approached us. As it drew a little nearer, we saw in the hands of each of the company on her deck a shining spear. These were emissaries of the queen come to take us. Hunter shouted a direction, and our vessel rose from the surface of the water out of their reach, but near enough for conversation.

At this unusual sight those on the approaching boat were thrown into temporary consternation. The boat stopped abruptly, and they stood at her rails, craning their necks at us, their faces blank with amazement. The queen was not among them.

Hunter, seeing no advantage in delay, caused a signal to be waved from our mast-head, assuring them that we knew their purpose, and intended to surrender without attempt to injure them. First, however, he wished to talk to them and invited them to approach without any fear.

Thereupon one who was evidently in charge of the party, a man none of us knew, gave an order, and the boat came on until it lay almost beneath us.

"We come from the queen," shouted the spokesman. "She bids you surrender your vessel and yourselves, and come with us to the market-place, where she awaits you. If you refuse, or if you offer any resistance after surrender, your father, who is in her hands, will instantly be killed."

I REMEMBER studying this man's face curiously as he spoke of killing in such offhand manner. Such sentiments would have seemed natural in the mouth of the queen herself. But I marveled that even her influence could in a bare three score sleeps have so transformed a civilized being of the Land of Light into a brutal savage worthy of the Zone of Darkness.

"I will go with you," Hunter replied; "but first tell your queen that I will not surrender my company or my ship. If she will allow them to sail away, as I pledge my life they will, I will do her bidding. If they return afterward, or offer harm, you may kill me."

After some demurring, this leader agreed to signal the queen this answer.

While we awaited her reply, I sought permission from Hunter to accompany him. I claim no great heroism in this. I did not at the time believe our lives were in danger. I was moved partly by loyalty to Hunter and partly by the instinct of my craft that bade me be where momentous events were happening. It was not without much argument and a threat at absolute rebellion that I won his consent.

Not to be outdone by me, each of our company in turn made the same request. Weaver was particularly insistent. Him, Hunter took into his cabin for a private conference. I did not know at the time what was said between them, but when they returned to the deck Hunter announced that he would have only myself with him, and Weaver acquiesced without further argument.

A moment later we saw a return signal waving from the nearest signal-tower ashore, which reported the queen's acceptance of Hunter's terms.

Weaver drove the vessel to a safe distance from the harbor boat to provide against possible treachery, and Hunter and I lowered on a life-raft. The vessel immediately lifted while the harbor boat was bearing down to pick us up.

It was with deep emotion that we finally left our comrades and the old ship that had borne us through so many perilous adventures together. Weaver took our pledge to the queen very literally, for before we were fairly aboard the harbor boat, he had driven the flying vessel up out of sight in the haze.

Aboard the boat, we were surrounded by

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armed men, thoroughly searched, and our hands bound behind us. By the time this was accomplished, we had touched the pier.

Thus in most humiliating fashion we returned to our home city. We were led through streets, deserted save for armed sentries of the queen here and there, a strange contrast to the popular tumult that hailed our departure.

And so presently we came to the market-square and into the presence of the queen. She stood in front of a great file of armed men, drawn up across half the square. We were halted in an open space some twenty paces in front of her.

I saw in the beautiful face of the tyrant, which had formerly held a mixture of childlike simplicity and barbaric cunning, a new veneer of sophisticated hardness. It was the face of one who could be infinitely, calculatingly cruel, and yet be swayed at times by overwhelming emotion.

As she looked upon her captive cousin, there crept into her eyes a sudden fire that was not altogether lacking in tenderness.

"And so, cousin, you have returned to me," she said. "I knew my love would win. Return that love and work with me, and you shall have unlimited power and glory. Refuse it, and my love will turn to hate."

She paused as if to give Hunter a chance to reply. I looked at him now. His head was bowed.

He seemed not to even notice the queen or those with her. His attitude was that of one listening for a distant sound.

And then I, too, fell to listening. Somewhere far off overhead it seemed I heard a familiar hum. It grew rapidly louder. The throng heard it now, and stirred about uneasily. The queen was so intent upon the captive before her, and the emotion his presence stirred in her, that I do not think she noted it until too late.

I looked up As I did so, there burst out of the mist directly over our heads the ship we had so recently left. I could just make out the figure of a man leaning over the side.

The next instant came a resounding crash on the pavement between us and the queen. I saw the queen reel and fall. Hunter staggered against me. I heard discordant shrieks. Then my own senses wavered.

Everything went black, and I knew no more.

CHAPTER VI

A WORLD ABLAZE

I RETURNED to consciousness to find that I was debating a problem of religion with myself. My last fleeting thought as I lost my senses was that I was about to die a violent death. When my glimpse of our ship above us had been followed so swiftly by an explosion at our feet, I jumped to the conclusion that Hunter had arranged with Weaver to release him from an impossible dilemma, and at the same time free Venus from the peril of the queen by dropping some infernal machine on our heads that had wiped out all our lives together.

A brief resentment that he had included me in the sacrifice had flashed through my mind, to be followed instantly by shame at such an unworthy thought, and pride that I had been permitted to share his martyrdom. So much can pass through a man's mind in an instant of deadly peril!

With this sharp conviction in my mind, I had no doubt now that I was dead. But if dead, ran the argument in my still dazed brain, then all our anciently taught and still firmly held beliefs as to life after death were wrong. For though I would, of course, possess a conscious self, I should not, according to all teachings of patriarchs for a hundred generations and more, have any memory of my past life, nor have redeveloped as yet the power to think. I should at the present moment be a squalling babe, a new little Scribner, with the soul of the lately deceased adult that I was, reborn in the body of a fresh offspring to my clan.

For in the theology of Venus all souls at death return to supply the bodies of a new generation of their own clan. And so I argued in a maudlin way over the riddle of the ages till at length I realized that I still possessed an adult body whose stomach was very sick, whose eyes and throat and nostrils smarted as though I had gone through fire.

Then I became conscious of a steady rumble and whir that seemed somehow familiar. At that I attempted to open my eyes, and succeeded after a struggle. I looked straight into the anxious face of Hunter, who was kneeling beside me about to present a cup to my lips.

This being dead was indeed far different from what we had been taught! Thank the Over Spirit, we still had our friends and could remember them!

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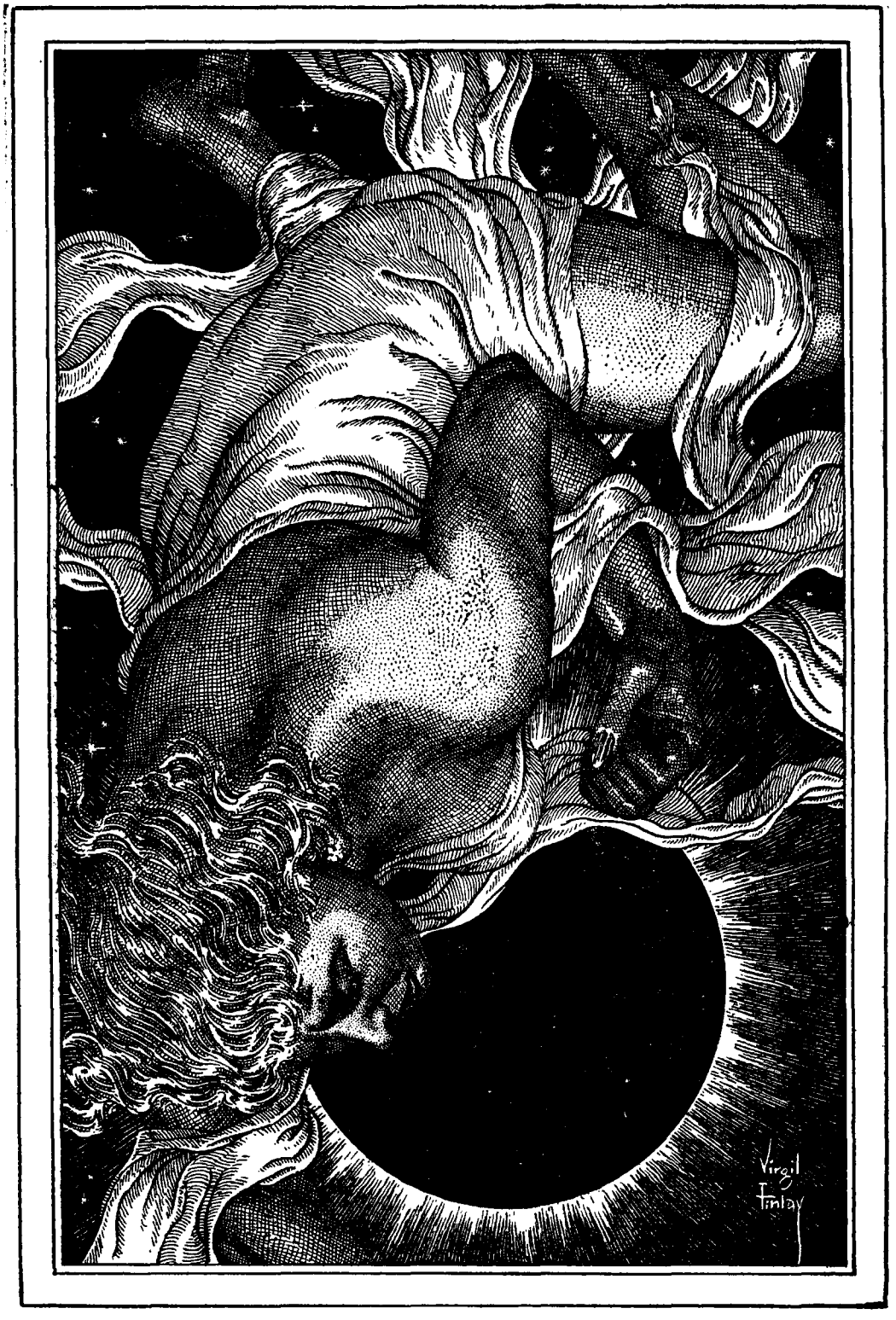

She rose clear of the floor as though she had the mere weight of a bit of water-fowl's down.

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"There, old fellow!" soothed Hunter. "You'll be all right now. Drink this and rest awhile. I'm sorry you had to have such a rough dose, but I couldn't risk warning you."

Weakly I obeyed and drank his draft. It seemed to leap through my veins and fire me with strength. My head cleared as if by magic, and I realized suddenly what nonsense I had been thinking. I was not dead, nor was Hunter. And the humming I heard was our good old ship's motor again. We had somehow been saved, and left our mad captors behind.

Then a flood of perplexities rushed to mind, and despite Hunter's protest I sat up and plied him with questions.

It seemed that while we waited over the harbor for the queen's reply to Hunter's conditions of surrender, he had been seized with a last-minute inspiration, a desperate expedient that might cost us our lives, but if it did would at least remove the queen from further troubling. Its execution he entrusted to Weaver.

On shipboard, he still had a large glass jar full of the anesthetic fluid. To this he added a chemical which greatly increased its potency, though making it dangerous to life. This liquid, exposed to air, would form a heavy vapor that would cause immediate and greatly prolonged insensibility, and leave the victim for some time afterward in a weakened condition, if indeed he survived the ordeal.

Weaver, according to instructions, brought the ship over the square just as we were presented to the queen. He dropped the jar of anesthetic on the pavement directly in front of us. Fortunately it hit no one.

Hunter had held his breath till the worst of the fumes had scattered, and escaped with nothing more than a brief fainting spell. The rest of us fell to the pavement, and when the ship alighted in the square a few moments later, our comrades found the entire throng lying like so many dead men.

The queen, Hunter, and myself had been immediately taken aboard ship. The Patriarch had been found a prisoner with a large group of his friends in his own house. Our ship's company had released them and armed them with the spears taken from the queen's unconscious bodyguard.

TO HUNTER'S relief, the Lady of the South had been found a prisoner here also, still alive, but momentarily expecting death at the command of the queen.

Then, satisfied that his father, thus protected, would be able to handle the now leaderless uprisings, he had at last sailed away from East Venus, taking with him the originators and essential souls of the two rival revolutions which had so nearly destroyed the ancient Land of Light.

"It has worked out far better than we could have hoped, had we planned it carefully," he added triumphantly. "My father is amply protected by his armed friends, and has promised me to lay aside, temporarily, if necessary, his prejudice against force. He will form a nucleus around which the saner elements will rally as fast as they come to their senses on finding their respective leaders gone. Many men of the queen's followers in other sections are still armed, and the women of the Lady's party will hardly dare refuse longer to work, now that they lack their leader's direction. On the other hand, no one else of the queen's former supporters will have her desire or ability to usurp power. So the two revolts will neutralize each other, and die natural deaths.

"Meanwhile we are left free to follow out our own purpose of discovering a new world, and may yet find a normal outlet for the spirits of our restless brothers and sisters."

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded incredulously, "that you have both those mad women together, alive, on board one small ship?"

"I have." He laughed. "Both very much alive, and already each is plotting how she can make way with the other and claim me for her own. And I, the Over Spirit help me, cannot but feel a certain admiration and tenderness for each. Either, once subdued, would make an admirable mate for a strong man."

It was evident to me, however, that our leader did not take the matter as lightly as his present mood of elation might make it appear. It would be some sleeps yet before we could actually put Venus behind us, and start on our second great exploration.

We must first find some place where it would be both safe and convenient to alight and prepare and provision the ship for its flight through vast, airless spaces. During this delay there were all sorts of possibilities for unexpected hazards to upset our plans.

Hunter had selected, as the best site for this preparatory work, the southern

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islands. They were well isolated from the main continent, out of signal-tower communication, and not likely to have been affected yet by either of the revolts. We would, however, find there all the supplies we needed.

At the time of my return to consciousness we were already on the way thither, and a sleep later we alighted off the principal harbor.

We lay there for ten sleeps. There were no signs of disturbance in the islands, though some report of the revolts had reached the inhabitants by the last ship from the mainland, and many excited visitors besought further news from us, some inclined to favor one party, some the other; but all, for the most part, quite content on being assured that the disturbances were practically at an end.

We allowed no one on the ship, however, save members of our own company. The work was pushed as rapidly as possible, and during all that time we kept our two prisoners below decks under heavy guard.

Nevertheless, paradoxical though it may seem, in view of the uncertain fate ahead of us, I, for one, did not breathe freely until we rose from the surface of Venus for the last time, and were finally started on our search for one of the new worlds we had seen shining in the blackness above the Land of Night.

We were now inured to danger and surprise. Nothing, we instinctively felt, could surpass in these directions what we had already met and conquered. We faced now the mysteries of the vast, empty spaces with a certain blasé imperturbability amounting almost to contempt.

How fortunate for us mortals that we cannot see clearly along the winding trail of the future! Had that pathway which lifted before us at this last sailing been for a moment illumined, I fear that even we would have shrunk from its perils and hardships, before which our sojourn in the Land of Night and our feverish reception on our return became as mere child's play in the safe garden of one's ancestral home.

AS soon as I was sufficiently recovered from the effects of my anesthetizing I had become greatly interested in the alterations Hunter was making in our vessel.

It will be remembered that during our first trial of the flying qualities of this ship we had discovered that at some distance air altogether ceased. Indeed, we had nearly paid for this new knowledge with our lives.

It was patent, therefore, that no attempt could be made to fly past the confines of Venus unless some way were found to carry our air supply with us. To my unscientific mind such a proposal was unthinkable.

It seemed, however, in no way to baffle our resourceful leader. In the first place, he made all the cabins air-tight, fitting double doors where entrance was absolutely necessary, and making their joinings air-proof. A large part of the deck, too, he covered with an air-tight shelter containing many heavily glazed windows.

What amazed me most, however, was an ingenious chemical apparatus, which was designed to consume the vitiated air of our breaths, and give forth again a pure, breatheable gas. It was, I confess, a bit of a shock to learn that the mysterious substance which I had always vaguely thought of as the very breath of the Over Spirit could be thus juggled with by mere mortals.

At any rate, when we lifted from the waters of the Southern Islands, our vessel was a miniature world within itself, stored with condensed, preserved food enough to last our little company of fifty for half a lifetime, and with countless other supplies which Hunter conceived might be important to us in case of landing in a savage or perhaps unpopulated world.

Keeping safely in sight of the surface of Venus, we shaped our course directly back into the Land of Night. For Hunter had in mind to locate again the region over which we had seen shining those myriad points, which he conceived to be worlds of light. It was his purpose to steer his course toward that single one which had so far outshone the others as to suggest that it was nearer than they.

For my part, I could not yet grasp the reasoning by which he came to believe these lights to be other than they seemed —merely particles of radiance in a black roof over-cupping the floating sphere on which we lived. But I reasoned that if they were such, they could not be at any great distance, and the truth would be quickly learned. Moreover, if they were lights set in a solid roof, as they seemed to me, there might quite possibly be on that roof the new world we sought.

"The matter of steering our course to this new world troubles me most," Hunter confided to Weaver and myself. "Once we

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leave the air of Venus, our wings will be useless for controlling direction. Therefore, our only recourse is to start from a position directly under the world we seek. Our vessel, when the lifting power is applied, will fly straight up. We must depend on its keeping to that straight course."

"And if we miss our aim," Weaver pronounced grimly, "we may fly on forever, lost between the worlds."

"That may be," Hunter conceded.

So you may imagine that our first elation at getting safely away from Venus cooled somewhat as we contemplated the perplexities and uncertainties before us. It was, after all, I confess, with somewhat the same feeling of desperation that we had experienced before under like circumstances that we again watched the light of our world fading away, and the chill twilight of the mysterious Land of Light swiftly closing around us.

In our newly enclosed decks, artificially heated, we had no need this time for the heavy garments with which we had sought before with poor success to fend off the bitter cold of the eternal darkness. We rode in safety far above the hazards of ice-mountains, savage beasts, and more savage human beings that had hitherto beset us.

Indeed, we saw nothing of the wild, eyeless denizens of the region, nor of the ice city over which our captive queen had formerly ruled; for no sooner were we well within the Zone of Night, or Hemisphere of Night, as Hunter reminded us our new knowledge should dub it, than Weaver drove the ship upward, and presently we emerged from the envelope of haze that shrouds our planet, and once more saw above us the brilliant galaxy of the black, spark-studded heavens.

ALL of us not needed below decks in the management of the machinery stood out under the glass roof windows, our straining eyes searching the great dome from horizon to zenith to locate once more that brightest of these heavenly worlds that had before beckoned to our leader.

Again and again some point stood out brighter than those near it, and led us to think we had at last found our objective. But each time, no sooner had Hunter bent our course to take up a position under it, than someone would sight another light of equal magnitude, and we knew we had again been misled.

Hunter and Weaver soon became greatly puzzled at this. Though the readings of their nautical instruments showed that we were approximately over the same spot from which we had before sighted our particular world, we cruised about there for an entire sleep without again bringing it into view.

At length they concluded they had made some mistake in their calculations, and decided, therefore, to cruise around this region in continually widening circles until, if need be, they had scoured the entire hemisphere. At the same time they drove the ship still higher, thinking thereby to get a closer view of these worlds above.

How futile this minute elevation was in comparison with the appalling distances of space we could not know at any time, of course. I think my own impression of them, as far as I had any definite one, was that our voyage from Venus to this world above could at the most be little greater than the distance from East Venus to South Venus.

However, what we did not know could not dismay us, and we continued our spiral cruise for three full sleeps quite unrewarded.

But at length, as we were about despairing, and Hunter was debating if we had not better drive for one of the myriad lesser lights, there arose above the horizon a clear, steady gleam, so different from the twinkling sparks about it as to be unmistakable. I was reminded, as I sighted it, of the description the queen had given of it when she first told us of the "light above" she had seen as a child during the great wind, "a light as of a torch a long way off."

So we headed our ship in the direction of this peerless gleam, and made toward it at all possible speed. And it rose steadily in the heavens as we advanced until it had mounted the zenith, and shone directly down upon us.

At almost the same moment we noted down on the horizon from which this desired world had arisen the same white gleam of dawn we had seen once before on emerging from the Land of Night. We had sailed almost across the dark hemisphere in search of our world!

"Strange!" Hunter muttered. "Can it be that these worlds move about in space? It is certain that we saw this world over our heads before when we were at the very center of the Land of Night."

"If it be true that this world moves, we may make a sorry chase of it," suggested

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Weaver. "If we aim at the spot where it is now, it may be far from there when we reach that spot. Once started, we cannot change our course."

"We must count on making such speed that it cannot be far away when we arrive," Hunter declared. "Then, too, I reason that if Venus draws all things toward it by a great attraction, as we know it does, yonder world will exercise a like power. For were not both created by the same Great Over Spirit? And we cannot think He builds capriciously or establishes his law by whim. Be that as it may, we are committed to our course, and it is too late for turning back."

Taking a sighting instrument and making it fast to the deck in an exact perpendicular, he held his eye to it until Weaver had maneuvered the ship so that it hung exactly under the light at which we aimed. He shouted to Weaver, and instantly the lifting motor began whirring at full speed. We all stirred uneasily. Then, as we felt the ship leap under us, we held our breaths. Some of us, I think, offered a prayer.

At last we were off on our long-planned voyage between worlds.

WE stood staring upward through the roof windows, our eyes fixed on that serene point of light till we were fairly hypnotized with its gleam. Our brains swam with emotion which overflowed in audible exclamations here and there through the company.

At length I became dizzy with staring, and had to turn away a moment to steady myself. Others, I noticed, were likewise affected.

Again I sought out the pale beam and watched it for long moments. Then one of our number broke the silence and voiced our common feeling:

"It grows no larger! It seems no nearer!" he said doubtfully.

Indeed, I think all of us, realizing something of the tremendous speed with which we were being hurled through space, and having not the slightest conception of the enormous distance that lay ahead, actually expected to see that far-off world begin almost immediately to bulk large above us. At that moment of disappointment we were diverted by another outcry.

"Look down! Look down!" shouted someone.

In providing for unobstructed vision in every direction, Hunter had built several alcoves in the deck-shed jutting out over the rails like shallow bay-windows with glass in the floor, so that one could get a clear view below.

To these observation ports we all rushed and looked over, as we had been bidden. Never shall I forget my sensations as my eye fell on the world we had left behind us. In our experience with the flying ship we had all become more or less inured to great heights with no support beneath. But the stoutest nerves quailed at the awful abyss that now opened under us. Many turned away at the first glance, sick with the horror of it.

Down, down, till it seemed there was no bottom to the universe, our vision at length rested on a circular field of softly glowing gray mist. So far below it was, and occupied so little space in the black bespangled circle of the nether heavens that it seemed incredible that this could be all that was left to us of the Venus we had known.

For the first time the full awesomeness of our situation burst upon our consciousness. Our atom of a ship was all the world that was left to us, a little company of half a hundred souls hung out in vast, bleak, empty space, supported on less than airy nothing, the world we had known shrunk to this unsubstantial shadow, as unreal and to all intents as far away as any one of the other glittering worlds about it.

Even as we watched, it had shrunk still more. In a half bow along one margin it gleamed with a soft, silvery effulgence fading out toward the center of an ashy gray, and on the far side becoming barely visible.

I was aroused from my trancelike intentness by a voice at my side, and Hunter placed his hand on my arm and clutched it spasmodically in his nervousness with such force that I shrank from the pain of it.

"Awful! Awful! But wonderful beyond words!" he whispered. "Who could dream it would be so?"

I looked at him, speechless with the inadequacy of such words as came to my tongue. I was about to resort to some banal reply when we were interrupted by a frantic voice behind us.

Carpenter, trembling so that he could hardly stand, his voice choking with the panic fear that had driven all blood from his pasty, tortured face, was clutching wildly at Hunter's sleeve like a drowning man at a life-raft.

He was utterly beside himself with abject, uncontrollable terror, and he, too,

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a man who had borne himself well through all the dangers of our previous voyage and had been one of Hunter's stanchest supporters at the time of the defection of part of our company in West Venus. Of his moral courage he had given abundant evidence, and his physical bravery had stood severe test.

But this sudden and overwhelming revelation of undreamed-of heights and the appalling sense of utter aloneness and helplessness had torn his nerves to shreds and annihilated his will and reason.

I was too conscious of my own panic greatly to blame the man. I hold him now no more responsible for his words and acts than a gibbering idiot.

"Take us back!" he rasped in a weird mixture of shriek and whisper. "Take us back! Take us back! Take us back, if you can! You madman, to get us into this! Take us back—or if you can't, let us die at once before we fall! I can't stand this! We're falling now, I believe!"

His tirade ended in a choking shriek, and he fell half fainting to the deck. This outburst was the electric spark to our explosive nerves. To some few of us, myself included, belongs the sorry credit of remaining at least passive spectators of what followed, making no demonstration of our panic, it is true, but too unnerved for the moment to be of any real service to our leader.

The majority of the company rushed around Carpenter, who had put voice to their own feelings and thereby given the little added impetus needed to drive their frenzied fear past all control.

Scarcely knowing what they did, they seized Hunter and dragged him bodily toward the motor-cabin.

"Make him turn back!" was the cry from a score of throats.

"Drop him overboard if he refuses!" shouted one.

"If we are to fall, let him go first!" screamed another.

"He knew this meant death! He sought suicide because no one in Venus believed his wild stories! We knew too much, so we must die, too!" came another hysterical voice.

"Shame! Shame!" cried someone at that.

We passive ones now had collected ourselves a little, and pushed into the frantic mob, exhorting them to be calm.

Weaver, at this, emerged from the motor-cabin, and his deep voice rose in a roar above the tumult, demanding silence. He backed up this demand with a pair of sturdy fists to such good purpose that the mutineers fell back a little, and presently he had Hunter out of their hands and standing with him, their backs to the cabin wall, where I and several other more sober ones joined them, not a little ashamed of our belated show of courage.

ALL this time Hunter had not spoken a word. Now he stood in dignified silence, eyeing them sadly, pityingly, understandingly, it seemed, without a trace of anger in his face.

This vigorous stand by Weaver, backed now by some dozen of us, together with the calm demeanor of Hunter, had a slightly sobering effect on our panic-stricken fellows. Some of them already showed a dawning shame at their conduct.

At length, when his voice could be heard easily, Hunter spoke.

"My friends," he said, "you don't know what you have been saying. Listen to me for a moment; then, if I cannot convince you that you are unduly alarmed, I will turn back as you ask. If I still seem then to be deceiving you, you may throw me overboard, as one of you has proposed, and as in such case I would richly deserve."

He paused for a moment, and a low, angry murmur arose in the hostile group before him. He silenced it with a wave of his hand and went on:

"I have no heart to blame you for your alarm. Our position is appalling even to me, but I am sustained by my faith in the ship I have built and the proofs that my ideas of the universe are true. I said that Venus was round, like a great ball. Men scoffed at me. But below us now it lies in full view for all to see. At this distance we can see it as a whole, and know that I was right. You believed me once on faith. Now you must believe me from the evidence of your own eyes.

"We are not falling, as one of you feared just now, else Venus would not steadily grow smaller in seeming, as it does. We can turn back toward it at any moment if you insist, but it is no worse to go on. What a shame to stop on the eve of a great achievement because our hearts had failed us!"

He paused again. This time the murmurings were fewer and less angry in tone. Under the spell of his personality they were forgetting for a moment their panic, and I could see that his argument was bearing weight.

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"We are going to have many trials to our nerves on this journey," Hunter went on, "and I beg of you steel your wills to meet them without panic, as you did so bravely the perils of our former voyage.

"You were alarmed a little time ago because the world toward which we are speeding seemed to grow no nearer. That means to me that the distance we have to go is vastly greater than even I thought. But I had, nevertheless, provided for a long journey with food to last many times as long as I had any idea would be needed. Would a madman or one planning suicide or murder do that?"

By now I could see shame stealing over the faces of his hearers. Several started to speak, but again he silenced them with a gesture and went on:

"Now, let us watch the world above us and see if, after a little, it does not draw nearer. I promise you this: If within half a sleep it is not clear to your eyes and minds that we are actually approaching our goal, I will turn back again. I must exact from you in return a promise that in the meantime you remain quiet and in no way interfere with the running of the ship. Do you agree?"

He ceased speaking and awaited their reply. Several, thoroughly converted, gave assent at once. Others followed a little doubtfully, and finally the remainder, seeing themselves in a minority, grudgingly joined in the promise.

Then with one accord we fell to studying the heavens above us.

At first glance there seemed to be no visible change. The countless lights still twinkled as mere points of brilliance and still seemingly no nearer.

But after studying for a moment in comparison the steady light of that brightest of these illuminations, toward which we aimed, it seemed to me that there had been a change in it since last I saw it. I feared at first it might be my imagination, and said nothing.

But the longer I looked, the more convinced I became that I was no longer gazing at a mere point of light, but at a tiny sphere that, as I looked, took to my eyes a definite size about equal in diameter to the nail of a man's thumb. No longer in doubt, I cried out excitedly:

"It shows nearer already! It has grown larger. It is a globe like Venus!"

One after another my fellow watchers assented.

"You are right," Hunter declared. "My faith is justified sooner than I had hoped. We will wait, however, for stronger proof."

We had been so intent on this that we had not noticed a new element that had been creeping upon us unawares. There had been no lights on the vessel, save one small deck-lamp. The others had been turned off when we started our upward flight, that we might better see the phenomena of the heavens.

But now several of us noted at once that a bright glow pervaded the deck-shed. Our solitary light paled before it. We stared about aghast.

"It comes from below!" someone shouted suddenly.

We turned toward the observation alcoves. From their bottom windows streaked upward steady beams of intense white light!

Again we looked down, and again we fell into panic.

Our world of Venus that a little before had gleamed so dully had burst into brilliant flames, blazing from all its circular rim far into the heavens.

ONLY a fleeting instant this tremendous spectacle smote our retinas, and then, with hands before our faces, we shrank back from the windows, our eyes, accustomed only to the soft lights of our world, stricken momentarily blind by the terrible glare.

I expected this new and yet more frightful turn of affairs to bring on a fresh panic; but it seemed that our nerves had been harassed beyond the point of reaction to further horror. Even those who had been most hysterical at the first discovery of our position now stood in stunned apathy at this later revelation.

Indeed, it was Carpenter, who had precipitated the recent mutiny, who now first collected himself sufficiently for coherent speech.

"My friends," he said as solemnly as his shaking voice would allow, "we have the answer to our demand that we turn back home. Who now wishes to return? Hunter, I am ashamed even to apologize for what I said. While we were accusing you of leading us to destruction, you were saving us from a terrible death by fire!"

"By the Great Over Spirit!" swore Weaver, getting his breath at last. "I never believed before in prophecy, but who can doubt now that our leader is a prophet and foresaw this destruction coming?"

"I am no prophet," Hunter disclaimed. "This destruction of Venus by fire is the

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last thing of which I could have dreamed. Had I foreseen it, would I not have saved at least my own father from this terrible death? Would I not have labored unceasingly to provide other ships to save as many as possible of our unfortunate brothers and sisters? Alas, I had rather have perished with them!"

His words instantly shamed those of us who had given first thought to our own fortunate escape.

"We cannot question the wisdom of the Over Spirit in this," I said, seeking for some words to comfort him in his distress of soul. "None of us can think you consciously foresaw this destruction. But can't we believe humbly that the Over Spirit ordained you to select certain ones of us for salvation from death? Why we of all others were chosen, we cannot say, but to us perhaps it has been given to perpetuate the race in this new world to which we are flying."

He looked at me sadly, doubtfully.

"It may be so," he assented. "Who can decide what is just in the eyes of the Over Spirit? Be that as it may, we are here. They are gone. It is for us to meet bravely the conditions that are.

"Our great purpose was to provide a new world for the teeming peoples of Venus. Now, those for whom we strove and sacrificed have been blotted out. It remains, then, our duty to preserve ourselves and continue our fight to the end."

During this time the light that permeated our ship had grown steadily brighter. We slowly recovered the partial use of our tortured eyes, but they continued to smart as though laved with corroding chemicals. We were still unable to look toward the lower observation windows through which streamed this terrible glare.

This growing intensity of light suggested to someone that perhaps, after all, our ship had turned and was falling back toward this fiery caldron into which our doomed world had been converted.

The suggestion disturbed even Hunter. He made haste to examine the lifting device, and reported that it was still working properly, and that we should be continuing to rise, unless the conflagration of Venus had interruped the working of gravity and caused our lifting-stone no longer to repel as it should.

"We can test that fact by observing the world above us to see if it has drawn any nearer since last we looked at it," suggested Weaver.

But this apparently sensible suggestion was easier made than carried into effect. We found, on looking up, that our seared and streaming eyes could make out nothing save an indistinct blur.

We laved our eyes with water, and held them closed moments at a time in the hope that in thus refreshing and resting them, their full use might be quickly restored. But it availed little.

At length Hunter was seized with an idea—one whose whimsicality struck me forcibly even at that tragic moment.

"We have forgotten that we have aboard with us two good pairs of eyes that have not been injured by the glare," he said.

We turned to him, bewildered, not comprehending for the moment what he could mean.

"I mean the queen and the Lady of the South," he explained.

You may well imagine that the shocks and perils we had been experiencing since we left the surface of Venus had driven our fair passengers quite out of our minds.

Indeed, we had all been so engrossed with the affairs of our flight that once we had these two troublemakers safely secured, each in a suite of staterooms of her own and at opposite ends of the ship, none of us gave any further thought to the women who had for a time held our fate in the balance, excepting the guards appointed to watch and feed them, and Hunter who visited them regularly. They were no longer important factors in our lives.

True, I had speculated at times as to what would happen when we finally reached our destination if the two women should be released and allowed to get together freely.

I WAS puzzled now as to how Hunter could expect either one to serve us willingly, and expressed my doubts.

"I would myself hesitate at releasing the queen at the present time," he admitted. "But the Lady of the South is in a somewhat different frame of mind. She feels deeply grateful to me for saving her life in East Venus. She was quite contented to come away with us, for she realized that her cause in Venus was lost and that her life was not safe there. Moreover, I am sorry to say, her zeal for her cause was wholly secondary to her desire to marry me, and she now hopes that she has accomplished that wish. Her confinement to one suite of rooms has been made quite satisfactory to her on the ground

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that she is thereby safe from the queen, of whom she is in mortal dread.

"As far as the queen is concerned, I think she, too, will be quite reconciled when she finds that Venus has been destroyed and that her kidnaping has saved her life."

"But," Weaver demurred, "once you bring the Lady out on deck, will not she, too, be blinded by this glare and be then in no better case than we?"

"Quite right," Hunter assented. "I had not thought of that. Is there no way to dim that outrageous light?"

"There is," cried Weaver triumphantly, after a moment's thought. "We have in our stores some black paint for use in keeping the ship's hull freshened. It will take but a little time to blur over those lower windows, through which the light streams, with a thin coat of paint."

"Well suggested," Hunter agreed. "You might detail several men to that work at once. They will, of course, have to act mainly by feeling. Each had better hold a shield over his eyes while he works, or he will be blinded completely."

"In the meantime," cried Carpenter, with a new show of excitement, "we may be falling head on to destruction!"

"Contain your fears, Carpenter," commanded Hunter, with unwonted sternness. "There is practically no chance that we are falling back toward Venus. But if we are, I assure you time will make no difference. For there is no power or device by which we can stop that fall if our lifting-stone has refused to work."

At this Carpenter turned away, rebuffed, but evidently doubtful. We stood or sat about helplessly in our half-blinded state, while Weaver carried out Hunter's direction as to the painting. Hunter himself went below to inform the Lady of the South of our predicament and prepare her to act as the eyes of our ship.

Weaver's suggestion as to the paint proved a happy one. The coating of black once applied, the glare of light ceased, and little by little some degree of normal service returned to our vision. It was several sleeps, however, before my eyes ceased smarting and my sight became entirely clear. In fact, my eyes have never fully recovered their former strength.

Presently Hunter returned to the deck with the Lady of the South. It was the first time I had seen her since my famous interview with her before we sailed on our first voyage. Now my eyes still troubled me too much to make out her features clearly, but I noted that her bearing was calm and dignified, and that she still affected the same style of robe as that in which I had first seen her.

She took her place under the roof window and looked up, as Hunter directed her.

"What do you see?" asked Hunter, after she had studied the heavens for a moment.

"I see a little, round, pale spot in a black sky, right over my head," she said. "Around it are several little points like tiny lights, only very pale."

The glare of the light below us had evidently made the heavens above less brilliant by contrast, even as it had seemed to dim our deck-light.

"How large is the pale, round spot?" pursued Hunter.

She held up her thumb and finger spread a little apart.

"About so far across," she answered.

The measure she gave proved beyond doubt that we were steadily approaching our new world, for its size, judging by her rough measure, was at least twice what it had appeared when we last noted it. So each of us, according to his state of mind, took certain comfort from this assurance and began to assume as philosophical an attitude as possible toward our precarious position.

Hunter now insisted that we return to our routine, prepare regular meals, and resume our watches as before. We were too excited, however, to take great interest in our food; and I, at least, found my first attempt to sleep a lamentable failure. Hunter, as was his wont in times of peril, slept only in brief naps. He took observations of the heavens from the Lady at regular intervals and each time reported noticeable progress. Several sleeps passed in this way without further excitement. We were becoming almost inured to our strange routine. The world above, according to the Lady's estimate, now showed a span the width of a man's hand.

Then came the time when Hunter's eyesight was sufficiently restored to make an observation himself. At his first glimpse of our goal he uttered an exclamation of despair.

The fear he had expressed when we started out as to our holding a course directly at the world above had been realized. Our goal no longer shone directly over our heads, but off considerably to one side. It had moved, as he feared, or else we had turned from our course.

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At any rate, we were shooting off into the empty heavens far wide of our mark!

CHAPTER VII

THE ISLE OF CHANGE

I HAD happened to be standing next to Hunter at the moment of his making this disheartening discovery, and caught the full import of the fragmentary exclamations that escaped him.

He recovered his caution immediately, however, and looked around to see who else had overheard. Fortunately none of the rest of the watch were near by at the time. We had all grown somewhat accustomed to these regular observations by Hunter and the Lady of the South. As long as our leader had depended entirely on another's eye, the reports had continued optimistic.

To her untrained observation, the gradual departure of the world above from the exact zenith had meant nothing, if indeed she had noted it at all. So the reports had become an old story, and we had ceased to give much heed to them.

"I think no one else heard," Hunter whispered, seeing from my stricken face that I at least had taken in this new situation. "Say nothing about it at present. I must consult with Weaver, and see if we can think of any device to alter our course. I confess it seems hopeless to me at the moment, but there's no need of plunging our companions into despair yet by letting them know of it."

He called Weaver and told him of our predicament. The shipmaster received the news in grim silence. Finally he walked out and observed the nearing planet for himself.

"There is no way to tell how much of our distance to the new world remains to be covered," he said at last. "Let's see if our eyes will stand another look at Venus."

The three of us approached the blackened floor-windows rather gingerly, but discovered that we could look with impunity at the blazing orb, now that the dimming of the glass had cut off most of its rays. We were greatly puzzled, however, to note that the fiery disk did not appear appreciably smaller than it did when the flames first burst out. This in spite of the fact that we supposed we had been receding from it at tremendous speed, and that the world above had in the meantime certainly increased steadily in apparent size.

"There are two possible causes for that," Hunter reasoned. "Either the burning of Venus has caused it to swell enormously in size, or else we have reached a point beyond which our lifting-stone refuses to act and we are hanging in one spot. The apparent increase in size of the world above might be due to that world moving toward us instead of we toward it. In that case it is pursuing a diagonal course across our path, and I see no hope of our meeting it."

How strange now seem all these blind speculations of ours as to these unfamiliar elements of the starry spaces, as we look back at them after being set right by the ages-old earth-knowledge of astronomy! The merest schoolboy of earth should have been able to show us how greatly we still erred in our conceptions of the nature and movements of the heavenly bodies.

Now that I found I could safely hold my gaze on the great conflagration, it became a fascinating study to me. The flowing disk appeared about three times the width of a man's hand. From its margin great streamers of flame shot far out into the heavens. Off near one side was a small, circular patch of black about the same size as the world above now appeared to us. This, I reasoned, was a small area of our old world not yet touched by the flames.

I wondered if by any chance that spot, not yet overrun, was an inhabited area, and if those living there were still ignorant of their approaching fate. I pictured in imagination the awful agony of those whom the flames devoured. At the same time came to my mind the hope that perhaps the flames would die out before that area was burned and so that some of our people might escape, and I prayed that it might be so. I was aroused from my gruesome reverie by a joint outcry from Hunter and Weaver, followed on the instant by a shrill mocking laugh from the motor-cabin.

No need to look around. I knew that laugh all too well. When I did turn, I saw, as I had expected, the queen. That redoubtable female was standing over the controlling pins of the ship's motor. Somehow, during the distractions due to the kaleidoscopic succession of perils that beset us, she had taken advantage of the inattention of her guards and had escaped. Now she stood with one hand on the controlling pin of the lifting-motor, with the manipulation of which she had become perfectly familiar in her continuous attendance on Hunter during the latter part

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of our previous voyage. Her malicious eyes fixed Hunter's in flashing triumph.

In her other hand she held a heavy hammer directly over the delicate and complicated mechanism of the motor control, the slightest disarrangement of which would hopelessly disable our lifting apparatus and leave our ship to plunge to destruction.

"Now, cousin, I have you again," she taunted. "Don't take a step or sound an alarm, any of you, or I'll smash your precious motor. I know its workings. It means that your ship will drop, and we'll all die together. I'm not afraid. Better die than be shut up like a slave. Now, we're going back to our world, where we belong, and where I now will rule as queen. You told me you were going to take me to a new world, but you are not. I'm running this ship now. Try to interfere at your peril."

WE stood, eyeing her helplessly. We could not doubt that she would keep her promise. We had seen enough of her desperate determination on other occasions. Let one of us make a false move, and that menacing hammer would fall. The motor that kept our ship supported in space would not only stop, but no one could start the mutilated machine without extensive repair, which could not be accomplished before we had fallen all the way back to our blazing world.

I trembled at the thought that her deadly rival, the lady of the South, might inadvertently stroll on the scene at this inauspicious moment. I feared that the queen's rage at such an appearance might lead her to carry out her threat, willy-nilly.

But no such complication intruded. Her purpose was fired by iron determination to rule, but without the element of wrath. She stood there, taunting us with her mocking eyes and threatening hammer for several moments.

Hunter reasoned, as he told me afterward, that it was best to appear for the time being to yield to her absolutely. If she insisted on shutting off the motor by the controlling pin, it would still be possible to make her see her mistake and her peril before we returned too near to Venus to be in danger.

"I admit you have the best of me," Hunter assented finally. "You do not need to wreck our motor. Turn it off, and let the ship fall back to Venus if you wish. No one will interfere with you. We value our lives too much. We had just learned that we had lost our way in our course for the new world above, so it was useless for us to go on. I am, therefore, quite ready to agree with you."

But I assure you that neither Weaver nor I, nor the two other members of the watch who had happened along in time to take in what had occurred, felt any of the nonchalance that Hunter was attempting to assume.

Of course we knew, as a matter of fact, that it would take as long to fall back to Venus as it had taken to fly thence. That would give us several days' leeway in which to effect some safe method of overcoming the queen, or of persuading her from her purpose. Probably when she saw the fiery ruin to which we were falling, she would be reconciled to giving up her obsession.

But in the alarm of the moment we thought out nothing clearly. We merely felt that our only support from imminent destruction would be gone, once the lift-motor were stopped. It seemed to us that even to pause in our flight would mean that the spreading flames of our world would leap up and devour us. Nor was it any foregone conclusion with us that the queen would accept Hunter's acquiescence and refrain from wrecking the motor. We had always been convinced that she was at least half mad. Now we feared that she might be quite so.

These fears she must have read in our faces, for she continued to feed them by swinging the hammer up and down over the motor, her evil smile growing the more pronounced.

It seemed an endless time that she stood thus gloating over this tearing at our raw nerves. I know that during that time I held my breath.

At length she seemed to weary of this by-play, and withdrew the hammer from its dangerous neighborhood. At the same time, with her other hand, she thrust in the control-pin and the motor ceased humming.

Of course the momentum of our tremendous speed could not be checked instantly. So, despite our instinctive dread, nothing perceptible happened at that moment, save the cessation of the sound of the motor.

Now the queen turned to us and held the hammer before her.

"I'll keep this in reach, and use it if necessary," she declared. "So let there be no treachery." As she spoke, she tossed it toward a corner of the cabin.

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Then something did happen, the beginning of a most astounding series of incidents.

IT had not seemed to me that the queen employed any force in tossing aside the hammer. As far as I thought of the trivial matter at all, I had expected so heavy an object to drop almost at her feet.

Imagine our surprise, then, to see it shoot out in a straight line parallel to the floor and crash into the farther wall of the cabin some ten paces away.

Then our surprise turned to blank amazement when the heavy metal, instead of dropping to the floor, rebounded from the wall and started back across the cabin still parallel to the floor, but now moving quite slowly as though merely floating.

The queen had been watching our faces, and had not noted the beginning of this miracle. But suddenly she saw the hammer float by her face, barely missing the tip of her nose. It was naturally startling. She screamed and jumped. Then, climax of amazement, with that slight impulse she rose clear of the floor as though she had the mere weight of a bit of waterfowl's down.

While we stared, stupefied with amazement, in which for once Hunter fully shared, she rose gently to the ceiling and lodged there, on her face a look of the most utter astonishment I have ever seen on the face of a human being.

For a moment she seemed stunned by the shock. Then she recovered her breath and began screaming with terror and thrashing about frantically with arms and legs.

At these outcries, two others of the watch who were a little way down the deck, had, as they said afterward, started to run toward us. With the first step they shot forward into the air. Our first intimation of their predicament was when we heard their shouts of astonishment and saw them come sailing toward us on a level with our heads, kicking vigorously in an effort to regain their footing.

I had been so absorbed in this amazing spectacle that I had not noted before anything peculiar in my own position or that of my other companions. But now, as one of our brethren sailed by uncomfortably near my head, I instinctively attempted to dodge back.

My own feet were not touching the floor! I had likewise in some mysterious way lost my weight, and I saw at a glance that the rest were in a like predicament.

Before we had time to collect our wits and do any clear thinking, the deck began to move sidewise under us, slowly, almost imperceptibly, then with gathering speed. Finally, with an abrupt lunge, the ship rolled completely over and lay bottom side up with the blinding rays of the burning planet that a moment before had shone dimly through the blackened bottom windows, now blazing unchecked through the broad roof-lights, filling the deck-shed with a fiercer glare than ever.

My last glimpse, before these battering rays compelled me to close my eyes, revealed my companions and myself still floating upright in the air, but with our feet now pointing at the roof.

The shrieks of the queen had redoubled. Even in my own distress of mind I was able to glean some satisfaction from this evidence that the hitherto dominant and imperturbable woman had at last met a situation that completely unnerved her.

So for a little time we hung suspended in thin air, half blinded, completely helpless, waiting with chilled hearts for the next blow of a freakish fate.

But presently I felt the top of my head touch something. Shading my eyes carefully with one hand from the glare at my feet, I looked up and found that my head rested on the inverted deck. Even as I discovered this, my mind underwent a strange reversal of the sense of direction. A moment before, I had seemed to be still in an upright position.

Now, without at all altering that position, I suddenly acquired the sensation of standing on my head. The deck once more seemed properly down to me and the roof up. Now the blazing world of Venus was over us, and the world we sought below us. I began to feel the pull of weight toward the deck, and a slight congesting of blood in my head. My body swayed toward the deck, and presently it was stretched full length along it.

I made out my companions in like position, and, near by, the queen.

That lady a moment later ceased her clamor, arose gingerly to her feet, and felt her way into the ship's cabin. That act of hers completed our sense of reversed direction, and one after another we followed her example.

Cautiously we tried our legs, and finding that we could stand, and that the pull of weight was actually toward the inverted deck, we groped our way to the cabin for shelter from the dazzling light.

But, though the direction of gravity had

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thus unquestionably reversed itself, its pull was still very slight. We had the sensation of being as light as feathers. With each step we had a tendency to bound upward half a pace.

At the moment, Hunter was as much at a loss as the rest of us to account for the amazing phenomena. It was not until later that he found a theory as to their cause which did not fall far short of the truth, as explained to us some time afterward by an earth astronomer.

As even the laymen among my earth readers may already have guessed, we had just passed through the neutral point where the attraction of gravitation of Venus was exactly balanced by the gravitation of the other heavenly body toward which we had been driving. At that moment, therefore, our bodies ceased to have any weight. The tremendous momentum of our upward rush from Venus under the impulse of our lifting-stone had driven us past this dead center. At that instant the queen had shut off the lifting motor and left us within the pull of the other planet.

Hence, naturally, the hull of our ship being its heaviest part, the vessel had rolled over, and what had a few moments before been "up" to us, now became "down" so, as the pull of the new planet became stronger, we had gradually settled back to our inverted deck.

Of all this, however, we were ignorant at the time, and general confusion reigned in our company. Hunter presently recovered his self-possession, and directed the draping of the cabin windows with our sleeping-pad coverings, to shut out the blinding glare. This done, with Weaver and the mechanics, he gave the ship's machinery a thorough examination to see if it had been damaged in any way by our strange capsizing, and also if any freakish misadjustment, due to the queen's meddling, could have caused the inexplicable trouble.

I, having no part in this technical investigation, turned to wondering what had become of this female meddler. She had not been seen since she had found her feet and fled into the cabin.

Fearing that she might be up to other mischief, I set out in search for her. I found her in her own suite, lying face down on the floor, her head buried in a blanket, weeping convulsively, and trembling violently from head to foot.

MY HATRED for the woman was for the moment lost in pity. Several times I spoke to her before she gave me any heed, and then she scrambled to a sitting posture and shrank away in fear.

I resolved to take matters in my own hands and push the advantage of her unnerved condition to drive home permanently the impression her late experience had made upon her.

I am as much a devotee of truthfulness as the next man, but I was convinced that here was an occasion when subtle prevarication for the accomplishment of good was amply justified.

So I gave her to understand that the miracle that had just thwarted her purpose to take command of the ship, and which had so terrified her, was entirely the working of Hunter, simply another of a long series of his exploits, beginning with his use of the anesthetic spray, that by now should prove to her that he was all too clever and powerful for her to get the best of. I warned her against any further rebellion, lest he at last lose all patience and do her real harm. Then I told her of the burning of Venus and that he had foreseen it and saved her, despite the wrongs she had done.

I had even the presumption to assure her that through all he had continued to love her, and might yet make her his mate, if she would remain hereafter gentle and obedient.

Then I referred to the Lady of the South. She already knew that her rival was on board. I told her how foolish she was to fear that woman's rivalry, inasmuch as the ancient customs of Venus forbade Hunter to marry her who was not of his clan. I assured her that if the lady came to harm through her, Hunter would hate her forever, and added that the best way to hold his heart surely was to show friendship for the lady.

The queen said little in reply, and that in broken sentences. What she did say, and her humble manner of saying it satisfied me, however, that she was utterly broken in spirit, and that we would have no further trouble with her. I saw, too, that she had been made genuinely ill by her experience. I left her, promising to send someone to look after her needs.

Returning toward the motor-cabin, I met the Lady of the South just leaving her suite. She had retired immediately after assisting Hunter at the last observations, and had slept through the whole disturbance.

Acting on the inspiration of the moment, I told her of the queen's experience and conversion and present illness. I told

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her the sick woman needed the attendance of another of her own sex. I assured her that she could take no surer means of finally winning Hunter's heart than to look after the welfare of his stricken cousin.

Somewhat to my surprise, and greatly to my satisfaction, though not without my misgivings as to the outcome, she assented to my suggestion and started at once for the queen's suite. What took place at that meeting I never knew, but it proved the beginning of a strange alliance, and what for a long time thereafter appeared on the surface to be a genuine friendship.

On returning to the motor-cabin I found our company faced with a new perplexity. The improvised drapings had been removed from the cabin windows, and the men were about to venture forth on the decks again. The fiery light from above was no longer beating through the roof glass with its former intensity. Instead, the glass had become clouded over till it had the opaqueness that our black paint had given the floor windows, and the light now came through dully in a degree that our sorely tried eyesight could easily endure.

What could be the nature of this new miracle we could not even guess, but were disposed to accept it at its face value and be grateful for its benefits.

This mystery was also deciphered for me afterward by my astronomical friend. It seems that so-called empty space has in it vast clouds of fine, meteoric dust drifting about till the attraction of some great planet draws it down. With the repelling force of our lifting-stone shut down, this dust had settled on our deck roof till a thin coating of it had clouded the lights.

But our present concern was to take advantage of the use of our eyesight that this gave us, and determine, if possible, what course our ship now pursued. Hunter was greatly concerned lest we were dropping back toward Venus, now that our motor was stopped, but the facts that our direction of gravity had been reversed, and that the dimension of the fiery sphere, as revealed dimly through the clouded glass, seemed no greater than before, militated against this fear.

He therefore sought to get another glimpse of the planet toward which he had originally set his course. Scraping a little of the paint from the floor glass, he took a brief observation and then shouted his relief:

"The queen's meddling saved us in spite of ourselves. She stopped the motor just in time, and we have swung into the attraction of the world we sought. It is directly under us, now, and we are dropping toward it so fast that it now seems nearly double the size it did when I last saw it. If our motor had been allowed to run on at full speed, as it was, we would have been driven away from it, and by now be lost in infinite space. At last we are on our right course, and are nearing our goal!"

WE GATHERED eagerly around the various floor windows, a strangely light-hearted company, fairly intoxicated by this sudden reaction from bewilderment, terror, and despair, to a climax of hope, now amounting, we thought, to practical certainty. Those off watch had been roused from sleep to share in the spectacle.

It seemed incredible that the faintly glowing sphere directly below us could be identical with that little point of light we had seen once shining over our heads seemingly an infinite distance away!

What marvelous prescience our leader had displayed in seeing all this in his mind's eye, when to our lesser imaginations that point of light meant nothing but a puzzling illumination! How shameful now seemed our puny doubts and terrors in the face of his sublime faith!

Had we not beheld with our own eyes, as we thought, our old world of Venus burst into fiery destruction, the flames of which we could still see by turning our eyes upward, we might well have believed that we were again being deluded by an error, as when on the surface of Venus during our other voyage, we had burst from the Land of Darkness to believe we were confronting a new Land of Light.

As we found then that we had merely returned to our own familiar land, it seemed now almost as though we must discover soon that we had described a great circle in space and were bearing down on our old home planet. But the persistent rays of that great globe of fire above prevented such illusion taking any real hold on our minds.

And yet the world now below looked, in size and form, the very counterpart of Venus as she had lain below us just before she had burst into flame.

But as we continued to sweep on down, and the new world gradually filled a greater space in our nether heavens, we began to note faint differences. Venus had shone with a faint, whitish glow, uniform in col-

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or throughout its surface, though brighter toward the side from which the flames first burst.

This new world had a faint, greenish hue, shading to a suggestion of blue in some areas and to darkish gray in others, save in one semicircular patch near its circumference where it showed nearly pure white.

Venus also had a somewhat hazy outline. This world was more clear-cut, its lines more definite.

Presently Hunter decided that it would be judicious to check our sheer fall a little at this point. He reminded us that a body falling unchecked steadily mutiplies its speed. There would therefore be danger, if our fall continued too long unhindered; that we would be unable to check our speed in time to avoid destruction when we struck the surface of the planet.

He turned, therefore, back to the motor-cabin and started the lifting-motor at low speed; then, making repeated observations of our apparent rate of fall, he adjusted the motor's rate so that we still continued our descent, but at a much reduced rate.

This regulation of our speed had just been completed to Hunter's satisfaction, when an exclamation from one of the party turned all heads toward the entrance to the main cabin.

To much greater astonishment of the others than to myself, the queen came forth with faltering, uncertain footsteps, and beside her, guiding and supporting her with one arm, her face all tender solicitude, came the Lady of the South.

There had been no opportunity for me to tell Hunter of the diplomatic duplicity I had employed in bringing these sworn enemies together, and you may be sure none was more amazed than he at this unexpected sight.

I hurried over to him, and in a hasty whisper related briefly what had happened.

He was so relieved and delighted at this solution of a problem that had weighed heavily on his mind during the whole voyage that he greeted them jointly with a measure of affectionate cordiality that would have left nothing to be desired by either love-sick maiden had it been directed to her solely.

But though I studied both faces carefully, I saw no trace of jealousy or resentment in either.

"Come, ladies," Hunter exclaimed, leading them toward one of the floor windows, "we have a happy surprise in store for you. Look down!"

But though the queen suffered herself to be led to the window, she did not look down as invited, but continued to stare blankly ahead of her. Nor did the Lady of the South seem concerned with the spectacle below us, but instead turned a pitying look first to the queen and then to Hunter.

"The poor girl cannot see a thing," explained the Lady. "She was stricken totally blind by that terrible glare."

We understood at once. The eyes of this woman, who had spent her entire life until recently in the darkness of the Land of the Night, had completely succumbed to the shock which had so nearly destroyed our more toughened vision.

This plight of the unfortunate girl affected me with conflicting emotions which I dare say were shared by others. There was a measure of retributive justice in the smiting of this wild-tempered and malicious creature with blindness as the result of her own wrong-headed act. On the other hand, there was something peculiarly pathetic in seeing such a young and beautiful creature made helpless.

Further than that, she had been the agent, involuntarily, to be sure, by which we were now approaching this promised land. It was her chance comment about the "light above" back at our first meeting in the Land of Night, that had set Hunter to seek a new world in that direction. And only lately it had been her wilful throwing off of the power of our motor that had made it possible for us to be safely arriving now.

And yet this fair, unruly instrument of the Great Over Spirit, who had all unwittingly proved our good angel, was not to be permitted to see the new world to which she had led us!

I HAD a fleeting feeling of guilt in the matter also. I had taken great pains to impress it on her mind during my lecture to her in her stateroom that the all-powerful Hunter had deliberately inflicted punishment on her for her rebellious conduct. I had, of course, not known then that blindness was a part of this punishment. I now had a sudden fear that she might hold Hunter responsible, and in the end seek some form of barbaric revenge.

But Hunter's manner toward her now went far toward offsetting this feeling, if, indeed, in her crushed and bewildered state of mind, it had ever been hers. He

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gently led her to a seat in the motor-cabin, expressing the greatest sorrow for her affliction, and assuring her that it would pass in time. He told her that we had all in some degree been stricken in the same way, but were all safely recovering.

She clung to him, weeping, for some time, and seemed to get much comfort from his words.

At the same time our tactful leader managed to convey to the Lady of the South, more by a look than by speech, the gratitude and affection she had won by her noble conduct.

So he left them together presently to return to the business of directing the ship.

There was no more sleep for any of us. Every moment of our time not actually employed in necessary duties was spent leaning, fascinated, over the floor windows.

Steadily the great sphere opened out below. There came a time when it seemed nearly to fill the nether heavens.

We discovered then another point of difference between it and Venus. It was not covered by an envelope of opaque mist like our old home. This at first caused Hunter to fear that we might shortly be stranded on a world without air. But a little later he was relieved by noting small patches of cloud floating here and there above the surface of the planet. Where there were clouds of vapor, he reasoned, there must of necessity be air to sustain them. There remained, however, the uncertainty as to whether or not this air would be of the same consistency and composition as the all-sustaining gas that surrounded our old planet. Might it not be possible that we would find ourselves surrounded by an atmosphere alien and poisonous to our form of life?

But some time later these doubts were set at rest in startling fashion. We had approached so near to this world that it now spread out under us like a great, circular plain from horizon to horizon.

We could now distinguish clearly the major details of this vast surface. And those of us who had sighed for change in our old, monotonous world were delighted to see that here, in the main physical aspects, at least, was unending, bewildering variety.

We looked down on vast, open oceans, dotted with green, irregular islands in great profusion, and bounded by great, winding continental shore lines. These big land masses, unlike our monotonous continent of the Land of Light, were varied by winding water-courses, instead of our straight canals; irregular inland lakes of all shapes and sizes, instead of our orderly storage basins; towering mountains, plateaus, and plains interspersed in profusion, instead of the almost unbroken dead level of Venus. It all lay below us like a great relief map.

But in the midst of these observations we were interrupted by a terrific shock.

Our vessel seemed suddenly to halt in its course. We were thrown violently to the deck. The ship creaked and ground in every joint—then began rolling and pitching violently.

We began struggling to our feet just as, with a roar and a crash, a big section of one side of the deck-house was torn away and scattered in fragments into empty space. We were overwhelmed by a strong blast of freezing air.

"We've struck air again!" Hunter shouted, as he struggled toward the motor-cabin.

We followed him in to warmth and safety, while our ship continued to careen on down.

After a few moments of manipulating controlling pins, Hunter got the ship's wings in operation again, and presently we were gliding down in great, easy spirals toward the surface of our new world.

After a little it became safe to appear on the now nearly open deck. The motion of the vessel created a strong wind that chilled us to the bone, but we threw on extra garments and braved it for the sake of gratifying our curiosity to the full.

We were now slowly descending over an open ocean. In the distance was a low, green shore toward which Hunter headed.

From now on there was no further incident of note, save as we drew nearer we now and then saw high-flying birds that indicated animal life similar to that on Venus. Of ships on the water or buildings on land we had seen nothing to indicate the presence before us of any human life.

So some half a sleep after first striking the air of this new world our vessel settled on the surface of this strange sea, and we began gliding toward a beautiful wooded shore backed by rolling green hills that lay only a little ahead.

We were standing forward in an eager group, each tensely waiting the moment when he could once more set his foot on solid ground.

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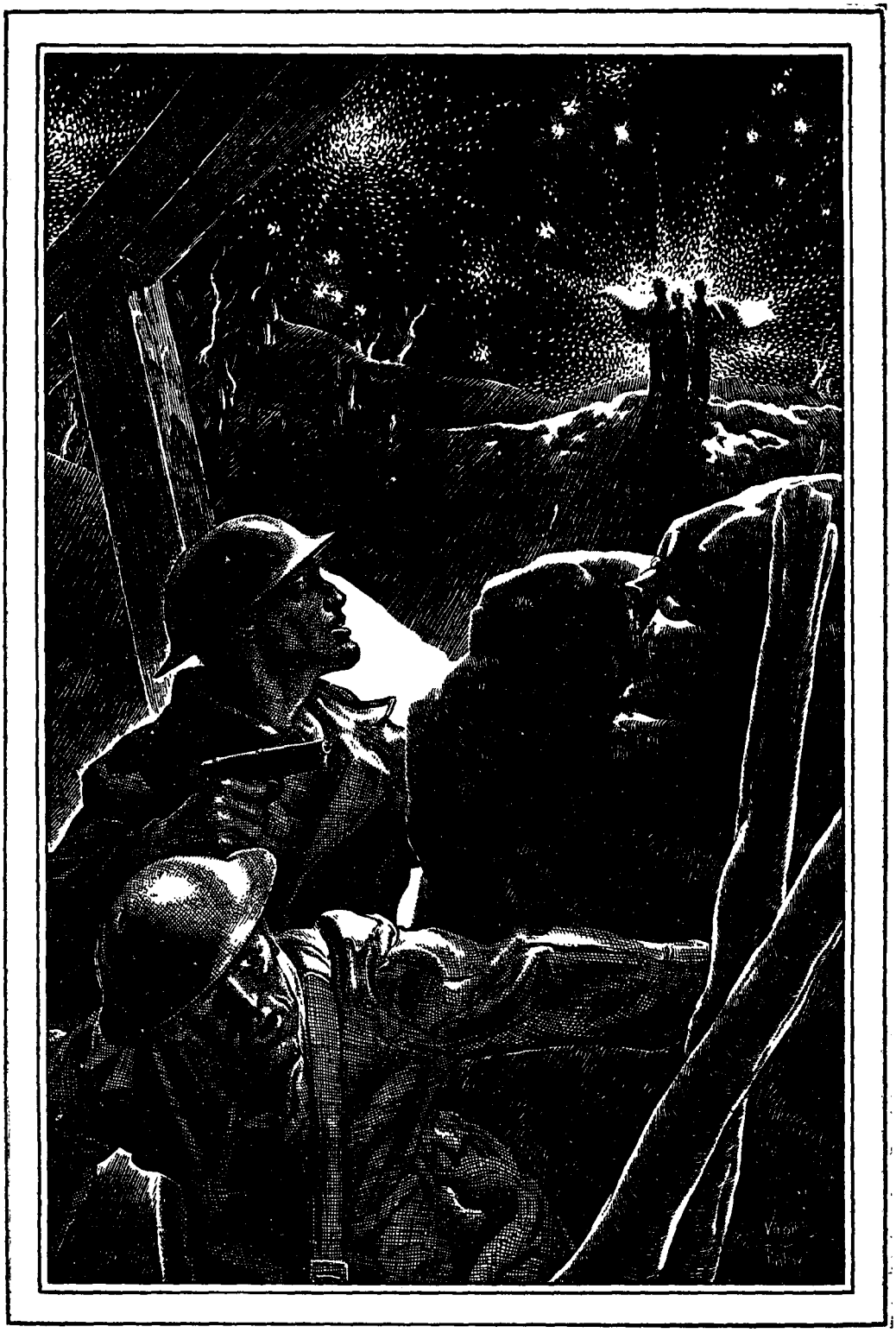

We must have presented a weird and impressive sight!

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Weaver had sighted what appeared a deep inlet, and was running in to seek harborage, when there came seemingly from under our very bows a thunderous report. The sea leaped up in a great column of water higher than our mastheads. I felt the deck suddenly rising under me. I was thrown violently down. Before I could struggle to my feet the great water column toppled and submerged us.

IN A twinkling the tranquil scene, the atmosphere of joyful expectancy that pervaded our company, had been changed to horrible confusion and terror.

The surge of green water that engulfed us when the great liquid column toppled over swept me with several others against the rail, where we clung, choking and sputtering, while the vessel heeled over till we were driven so far under that it seemed we were destined to drown there. Yet so powerful was the rush of water that we instinctively kept clutch on the rail rather than strike out and attempt swimming in the racing current.

Then, before I could collect my wits and consider the advisability of swimming free of the wreck, the ship dipped over in the other direction and bore us clear of the flood.

I saw, as I staggered to my feet, that several of my companions had been wrenched away and were struggling in the sea. Some still clung, half drowned, to whatever projection about the deck afforded a hold. Hunter and Weaver had been in the motor-cabin directing the ship when the blow fell, and though the room was flooded, they still held their posts.

A glance showed that the high bird-head figure at the prow had been torn away by some powerful explosion from under the surface of the sea, and that a gaping hole extended well below the water line, into which the sea was pouring in a torrent. Already the ship's nose was burying itself under the waves. The deck was taking a sharp incline, and the stern was gradually lifting itself from the water.

Then, before any of us could take thought to saving ourselves, an after hatch blew out from the compression of air within, and the ship began to dive straight down by the head. There was no time to launch such life-rafts as had not already been swept away.

But even as we clung to the now almost perpendicular deck to meet this final plunge, we heard the lifting motor whirr at full speed. By great good luck neither explosion nor flood had injured the machinery.

Our vessel stopped in its descent. It seemed to shake itself like a man emerging from his bath. Then slowly draw its nose from the engulfing waters.

A moment it hung suspended just above the churning surface, slowly returning to an even keel as the great weight of water poured forth from the gaping wound in the bow.

While Weaver held the ship at this height, Hunter dashed out, rallied half a dozen of us to his aid, and in a few moments we had launched our remaining life-raft and were rescuing those who had been swept overboard.

A little later, with all our company accounted for, and little worse for this final adventure, our ship ended the strangest voyage in the history of two worlds, and lay on a sandy beach well out of reach of the elements that had so nearly devoured it at the last.

But now that our perils seemed over, and we found ourselves with solid ground under our feet, a warm, clear air about us, and the flaming orb that had given us so much trouble shrouded a little behind a cloud that had lately drifted up, the reaction set in. We did not stop to speculate on the mysterious upheaval that had wrecked us.

Our worn bodies and nerves that for some three sleeps had undergone great strain without a moment's rest, cried aloud for nature's restorer. Not curiosity as to our new surroundings, not fear of unknown dangers that might lie in wait for us, not any remaining urge of nervous excitement, such as one might expect would still have held such castaways, could longer keep us awake.

Still in our drenched garments, with common and tacit consent we threw ourselves on the warm sand. No watch had been set. Precaution had been hurled to the soft, spicy winds that played about us. We slept the sleep of the dead.

And when we awoke it was dark!

I was among the first to open my eyes upon this unexpected change. When I found only blackness about me, the first confused thought that came to my half-drugged mind was that we were back in Venus and in the Land of Night. But why, then, this genial warmth?

Then I remembered that I had gone to sleep in a land of light toward whose

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ever-shining face we had flown for sleep after sleep. Had we been snatched away while we slept and borne to some strange region of night?

Trembling with apprehension, I arose and looked toward the heavens. The fiery orb had vanished. Instead there gleamed through all the firmament that same myriad of sparkling points that we had seen over the Land of Night in far-off Venus.

Had this world, then, also a Land of Light and a Land of Night like our globe? But how could we have been moved from one to the other while we slept?

Then my mind reverted to the queen, whose malice had before played strange tricks with us. Could she have made use of some of the ship's store of anesthetics, drugged us, and borne us away in our ship? Her blindness might have driven her insane and led her to perpetrate a ghastly joke.

But at that I remembered that the queen, being blind, was helpless.

Now I heard others moving about, and, calling out, presently located Hunter. He was as much perplexed as I.

"I would think that the fire of Venus had burned out and been extinguished while we slept," he said; "but we have seen this world gleaming with light from afar, long before Venus burst aflame."

I mentioned my thought of the queen and the possibility that we had been moved.

"It would seem that some strange power had moved us, but not the queen," he demurred. "I have found her near by, still asleep, as was also the Lady near her. Our moving may have to do with the mysterious force that wrecked our ship, but another such explosion would surely have awakened us. I fear we have to deal with new, mysterious forces such as we never dreamed of in the world of our birth."

At this moment I noticed, or fancied I did, that the darkness about us was not so intense as it had been. I called Hunter's attention to it. Certainly objects began to appear to our vision. We made out the dark hull of our ship. The dim forms of our companions could be seen here and there.

We scanned the heavens again in wonder. Then down on the horizon we saw a faint, gray streak of light. The brightness grew and turned to crimson. The lesser lights of the sky faded before it, save one clear, torchlike glow that hung just above this illumination and reminded us of the appearance of this new world when we had first viewed it from Venus.

But now the great glow spread and mounted and seemed to consume that one remaining spark. Suddenly Hunter grasped my arm convulsively.

"Is it possible," he cried, "that some vast, universal conflagration is consuming the universe: first Venus, and now this new world to which we have fled? Must we flee again?"

Black despair filled our hearts as we watched the flaming sky momentarily grow brighter.

Then one and all we gasped in amazement. Up out of the sea that still spread before us as when we lay down to sleep lifted the same glowing orb that had beaten its hot rays upon our heads when last we saw it.

This blazing world had broken from its moorings and was traveling about in the heavens, perhaps presently to collide with this planet and destroy it!

But our amazement and perplexity was tempered with relief at being assured that our new world was not yet in flames.

And again the demands of the body turned our minds from our greater worries. We were famished for lack of food.

So we turned to the ship, which we now saw, as a matter of course, lay right where it had come to rest before we slept, and partook of a hearty breakfast.

This accomplished, and no new marvel having beset us in the meantime, we began to view our situation with philosophical calm. We abandoned other speculations for the present, and fell to making ourselves as comfortable as possible in our new abode. Too many surprising perils and amazing mysteries had beset us in our long wanderings for us to dwell long over any new one.

THE ship remained our dwelling-place, but many of us, so enamored were we with the feel of the ground and the cool shelter that the great trees afforded against the growing intensity of the light from above, pitched tents improvised from blankets and green boughs and moved our sleeping pads to them.

Next we explored a little way about our landing-place. The shore at some points was high, rocky, and bare, at other points the forest came almost to the water's edge. These woods were a never-ending novelty to us, who had before known only the tiny trees of our walled gardens. Moreover, all the species of trees

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and smaller plants that we saw differed from anything we had known in Venus. The foliage was brighter, and of infinite variety of color and form, sharp contrast to the few varieties and general sameness we had always before known.

The number and variety of birds and the sweetness of their songs were also a novelty.

But nowhere in the short walks we ventured to take away from our landing-place did we see any sign of human life or mark of the hand or foot of man. So far, it seemed that we had preempted an untouched wilderness.

In the meantime the orb of fire had crossed the heavens and sunk from sight on the other horizon, leaving us once more in darkness. Being again weary, and seeing no profit in continuing our exploration by torch-light, we slept again, wondering as we lay down if we would ever again see this wandering light.

When we next awoke we were already reassured on this point, for the great globe of fire was just peeping above the horizon again. The light still troubled our eyes a little when we were out from shelter, but at no time did it blaze so intensely as it had in the airless spaces above, an indication, we thought then, that it was burning out.

After this alternation of light and darkness had continued unbroken for three sleeps, we accepted it as a regular thing, and thought less and less of the perplexities of the present and the uncertainties of the future. For the time being the thousand and one novelties about us absorbed our minds.

The view we had of this land before our ship came down had shown us it was an island of no great extent. We had not been here many sleeps before the Lady named it the Isle of Chicago, and it was not an inappropriate title.

So, beguiled by the delightful surroundings, we became less and less eager to explore farther, more content to lead a quiet life of idleness. Our past sorrows and dangers, all our former life in Venus, seemed very far away.

Then, in the midst of this pleasure-drugged existence, fell a blow that awoke us again to danger.

Every sleep, on arising from rest, we had become accustomed to bathing in the open ocean, a refreshing change from our cramped ship baths. We were all swimmers save the blind queen, and even she under the guidance of the Lady, soon mastered the art and seemed to take great delight in it.

Once when we were all in the water together, the queen, somehow, in her blindness, became separated from our group, and instead of turning toward shore, swam directly out to sea.

Hunter was the first to notice her when she was already some distance away, and called to her in alarm to turn back.

We all watched her as she paused and raised her head to catch the direction of the sound.

At that instant a straight, slender, upright object, that looked at a distance the size of a man's arm, arose in the water right beside her.

While we stared in helpless wonder a rounded thing like a great inverted bucket arose from the water bearing on its top the projection we had first seen. Before one of us could cry out in warning, the top of this object opened and we distinctly saw the head and shoulders of a strangely clad, barbarous-looking man protrude from the opening.

He reached out, grasped the unsuspecting queen under the arms, and drew her through the opening.

Then man and woman disappeared within the great bucket. The cover slammed down, and the whole thing disappeared beneath the waves.

CHAPTER VIII

A NEW RACE

NOT until the queen and her strange captor had been completely blotted out by the waters did we break from stupor of astonishment. Then there was not a man of us, whatever may have been his former attitude toward the unfortunate girl, but boiled with rage, and, forgetful of personal danger, dashed to the rescue.

Hunter led the group that had dived forward and were swimming in all haste toward the spot where this strange thing had happened But though we swam about, diving repeatedly to explore the depths below, until we were all exhausted, we could discover nothing.

After resting a little, some of us paddled out again on the life-raft and continued our search, but to no avail. The queen had utterly vanished and her brutal captor had left not a trace behind.

For many sleeps thereafter we continued the search, spending much of each

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period of light in the water, but nothing came of it. So at length we abandoned the search in despair.

But thereafter we never dared separate our forces. Hunter always kept his potent spraying apparatus with him and the rest of us carried always the short, deadly spears which we had brought with us, useful relics of the Queen's invasion of the Land of Light.

Whether Hunter's grief at the fate of the queen struck deeply I could not determine. I do know that he found ready consolation in the Lady of the South, and from that time on, the rival removed, I had no doubt that she would eventually overcome Hunter's scruples and have him for her own.

But aside from our natural grief at this first real loss from our devoted band, our greatest concern was, after all, over the discovery that we did not have this new world to ourselves. There were previous tenants, manlike beings apparently, but of what strange appearance and habits! I say this world was inhabited by others.

But our first glimpse of the mysterious new creatures indicated that their dwelling-place was the deep sea. If they did but confine themselves to that element we might well be enabled to occupy this new world in harmony with them, for the land and air were quite sufficient for our purposes.

But presently we were disabused of even this hope. It happened some thirty sleeps after the disappearance of the queen when we were out in a body exploring the slope of the high wooded ridge that led back from the shore. We had become weary and had paused on a flat table-rock overlooking the sea to partake of luncheon.

Then out on the still air came a cry, a feeble "halloo" coming apparently from only a little way up the slope.

We started up in surprise, and instinctively began to take account of our company to see if by chance anyone had strayed on ahead and become lost in the forest. But all of our party were present

Again came the "Halloo" a little nearer seemingly, but a bit more uncertain in quality.

A half dozen of us picked up our spears and started forward in the direction of the sound.

Scarcely twenty paces on, in another and smaller clearing, we came upon its source. Crawling painfully forward on hands and knees was something that was undeniably of the human form, but the most wretched sample of the species that ever I laid eyes on, excepting perhaps the blind savages of the Land of Light.

The creature was evidently suffering from ill-use or exposure or both. His strange, almost skin-tight blue garments were torn and spotted with mud and bloodstains. His head was crowned with short hair that looked as though he were in the habit of having it sheared, a practice unheard of in Venus. But stranger yet to us, this hair was almost jet black in color.

What perhaps to our eyes at that time gave him his most brutal touch was that his hair was not confined to the top of his head but grew in stiff, coarse bristles over all the lower part of his face, lengthening out his upper lip till it formed a ludicrous thatch above his mouth. No hair had ever grown on human face in Venus and this first view of a beard greatly amazed and disgusted us.

The large mouth with its tusklike teeth and the heavy jaw reminded us repulsively of the eyeless men of the Land of Night.

But this man had eyes, his only redeeming feature, beautiful brown orbs, such color as I had never seen in mortal head, and with expression suggesting, despite the other brutal aspect of his face, refinement and intelligence.

I called him a man, though at that time we had not the slightest notion whether he were male or female.

He was more sturdily built than the men of Venus, but much shorter, being I should say, a scant two paces high and reaching barely to the shoulders of the shortest of us.

He beheld us, on the other hand, with amazement apparently as great as our own. I could well understand, if this were a typical specimen of the people of this new planet, that our appearance must have been as strange to him as was his to us.

But while his keen, brown eyes expressed bewilderment and curiosity, they showed no trace of fear, nor did they betray any evidence of malice or ferocity. On seeing us he had simply raised both hands in the air and emitted a string of harsh sounds, both sign and sounds being unintelligible

So thoroughly harmless and peaceful did he appear, and at the same time so evidently in need of aid that we gladly bore him back to our bivouac, though at the same time we kept a sharp lookout

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for ambush or other form of treachery.

He ate ravenously of our food, though with a wry and puzzled face at the first taste, an expression he made haste to conceal. We were interested to note, too, that his manner of eating, though differing from ours, had none of the beastliness which we had learned to expect of a savage.

AFTER he had eaten, we bore him back to the shore and aboard the ship, where one of our party who was a physician bathed and dressed his wounds, which proved superficial, and left him to sleep.

With the next light he was up and about, apparently well on the way toward recovery.

During his convalescence, I was detailed to bear him company, with the end in view that I discover some key to his speech. Thus we hoped to obtain knowledge of the new world in which we were destined to live and of the strange race of men who dwelt there.

You may well imagine my task was a difficult one. I quickly discovered that there was absolutely nothing in common between our method of speech and his. But he was quick in intelligence and evidently as eager as I to open up means of communication.

So, little by little, by pointing at common objects and getting him to name them in his language and by long and earnest practice with his painful twisting of tongue, I began slowly to acquire a vocabulary which I, in turn, passed on to the others.

At length the time came when we could begin to ask him questions intelligently and in a measure understand his answers.

And the things we learned so passed beyond our powers of belief that for a long time we feared he was making game of us by weaving fanciful tales from his imagination. But I am free to confess that he entertained the same theory toward the story of our wanderings between worlds.

All that he told, however, later proved true. In fact, he was able, as he went along, to offer certain proofs that gradually gained him credit for truthfulness, but convinced us that here in this new world of change we were about to meet with stranger experiences than had ever yet befallen us.

I will not weary the reader with the slow and painful process by which we gleaned our information from him. When I say that among the first things he told us was that this new planet on which we had landed was called Earth, and that this was in the late summer of your year 1914, I need not reiterate what is familiar to every school boy and girl of you.

That this was a world holding not one but many races, speaking not one but many tongues, that these races were waging bloody war involving wholesale murder made a tale that it was difficult for a son of changeless, peaceful Venus to comprehend Further, it dampened all our ardor for settling in this unthinkably barbarous world.

Our informant, it seemed, was from a land called England, and the tongue he was teaching us was the English language. The original impression we had made as to his intelligence was correct. He had been a graduate student of astronomy at one of his country's great universities when the war broke out, and had enlisted in England's navy.

The island on which we found ourselves was an uninhabited bit of land in the Pacific Ocean which his country's chief enemies, the Germans, had made use of as a secret naval base for their boats that traveled under water. His ship had been sunk by one of them and he had been brought to this spot as prisoner.

As they were landing, however, he had managed to escape to the woods, where he had nearly perished from his wounds and lack of food. At length, driven by desperation, he was crawling back to the coast to give himself up when he had heard our strange voices and supposing us barbaric natives of these seas had chosen surrender to us rather than a return to the Germans.

The naval base of these barbarians, it seems, was hidden in a bay the other side of the ridge which we were mounting, and we would presently have stumbled upon it unawares and been made captives.

At his mention of the German submarine boats, Hunter perceived that here was a possible explanation of the mysterious wrecking of our vessel and the disappearance of the queen. I told the Englishman of these incidents.

"Undoubtedly," he affirmed. "Your ship was wrecked by one of their torpedoes. Those brutes don't stop to identify a vessel. You were nearing their secret base. That was enough. I wonder they haven't before now attacked you on land. Possibly, not being able to understand your

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strange appearance, they fear a trap. They are cowards at heart As for your unfortunate lady, evidently a submarine was studying your part off shore. A German submarine captain could never resist the temptation to kidnap a beautiful woman."

HE TOLD us tales of the treatment these people had accorded helpless people, accounts that made us faint with horror.

But, to digress for a moment from this distressing subject of the queen's fate, not all of the information our English guest gave us had to do with this bewildering and terrible Earth. Strange as it may seem, this son of Earth who had never left his native planet was able to tell us news of the planet from which we came, the world which for the first time we learned to call, in his English tongue, Venus. And that news, once we were convinced of its truth, filled us with new hope just at the moment when his dark picture of Earth had plunged us into the blackest despair.

It was some time before we could convince him that we had actually come from another planet. Not till he studied carefully our ship and its contents and found there many things he knew did not exist on Earth, was he convinced. Further, he admitted that we ourselves resembled no known race on Earth. As a final proof, Hunter demonstrated the flying apparatus of his ship.

When we described our planet in detail, the course we had taken, and the apparent time our journey had consumed, he at length identified it as Venus.

We were most at cross purposes, however, when we told him that our world had caught fire after we started and calmly pointed out the flaming orb above us as the planet in which we had formerly lived. One of us had made this statement at the outset and he had misunderstood our meaning.

But when it finally dawned on him what we meant, and we had again described the moment when we had first seen our world apparently aflame, he laughed long and loud, a rudeness for which he apologized profusely after his mirth would allow speech.

Imagine our incredulous surprise when he told us that our lately despised but now beloved Venus was intact and had never been touched by flames. Our joy when this was proven to us was unbounded.

But he convinced us at length that what we had mistaken for Venus aflame was really a great world called the Sun, thousands of times larger than Venus and Earth together, which had always been aflame, and was the source of light and heat for all the worlds that revolved around it, including Venus and Earth.

So in language fit for babes, as we were in this new knowledge, he explained the great mystery of the source of light and heat which had ever baffled our sages. At length we understood the meaning of our Land of Light and Land of Darkness, and learned of the changing light and seasons of Earth.

It seems that our delusion that we had seen Venus burning had been a very simple one. We had left Venus as it was in transit, that is passing directly between the Sun and Earth. We had started from the dark side of Venus, the Sun, which we had never seen or imagined existing, hidden behind our planet as long as we were close to its surface.

But there had come a moment when we reached such a distance from Venus that the planet could no longer hide the great sun behind it. So the flaming rays had shone out around our world and made it appear ablaze. From then on we had seen our old home only as a glimpse of a dark spot on the Sun.

As final proof the astronomer at sunrise the next morning pointed out the bright star we had already seen near that flaming orb at dawn.

"Behold your lost world!" he had exclaimed simply.

Choking with emotion, we watched it until its light faded in the glare of the rising sun. Then Hunter broke the silence.

"We will go back!" he exclaimed.

In our hearts every man of us fervently echoed his resolve.

"But first," he added, "we must rescue the queen from those barbarians."

WHEN Hunter made the statement that he purposed to rescue the queen if she were yet alive, we listened with grave misgivings. Once we would have mentally convicted him of madness. But we had seen our intrepid and resourceful leader make good too many strange resolves to be ready any longer to condemn him offhand.

Our friend the Englishman, however, seemed convinced that Hunter's hardships and dangers and disappointments had unsettled his reason.

As tactfully as possible he set forth the

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difficulties in the way of carrying out any such design. Hunter listened gravely, and stored away this information for future use. But it left his purpose unshaken.

One of your Earth proverbs declares that "fools rush in where angels fear to tread." I would not seem to characterize our leader as a fool. But his outlook on life was a simple and direct one. Stupendous as had been his undertakings and his titanic battles with strange forces, the elements of these conflicts had after all been few and offering little complication.

He proposed now, if necessary, to hew his way to the very heart of great, iron-ringed Germany and snatch this lone maiden from the Kaiser's millions of armed barbarians. And his plan of action was the same simple and direct one with which he had sailed across the formidable Land of Night. Had he been able to grasp the idea of the innumerable and complicated difficulties with which his way would teem, he might have hesitated, sought out devious methods, and failed.

But he was blind to all this. It sometimes happens in a world accustomed to meeting complications with more complications, that the very audacity of a simple soul wins by sheer surprise of directness. And on this basis Hunter unwittingly proceeded with strange results.

It was not till he explained to the Englishman the nature and potency of his anesthetic preparation by which in an instant he could make any number of men powerless, and had demonstrated its power, that our guest was ready to consider our leader's dream of a madman.

When he was convinced that we possessed a weapon of marvelous power his enthusiasm knew no bounds. It seemed that the men of Earth possessed poisonous gases with which they slaughtered each other in battle, and crude anesthetics which I judged were closely allied to these gases, but were used for the strangely contradictory purpose of ameliorating the sufferings of friend and foe alike. Such was one of the many paradoxes of this strange Earth.

But a gas like ours, that rendered a foe powerless without injuring him, was unheard of. He at once insisted that Hunter come to England and manufacture this article in unlimited quantities for his country, declaring that both could realize enormous fortunes thereby.

But to Hunter such a proposal was unthinkable. In the first place, to a native of Venus this talk of a fortune had no meaning. In the second place, we had no desire to take sides in this war, all parties to it at that time seeming to us equally barbarous. He deemed it politic, however, to give the Englishman no decisive refusal.

Hunter's plan was to take a picked group of us armed with anesthetic sprayers and under the Englishman's guidance, surprise the German base in the night, overcome and make them all prisoners. He hoped to find the queen there and make a quick end of our Earth sojourn. To this, our guest, now no longer skeptical, consented.

So there came a cloudy night when the stars were hidden and that other bright world, the Moon, with which we had lately made acquaintance was not in evidence.

In darkness as dense as ever held us enthralled in the Land of Night, we followed our guide, single file, up the long ridge and down a steep, winding path on the other side, into what he told us was a deep, narrow gulf at the head of which, screened by trees, was the German base.

The descent occupied the greater part of the night. We had to feel our way, inch by inch, over the unfamiliar trail. A misstep, our guide warned us, meant a possible fall over the precipice, or, at the least, a sound that would inevitably warn the foe of our approach.

The first faint glow of dawn had just begun to tinge the sky overhead when we reached sea level at the head of the gulf and spread out around the area in which, our guide declared, were the masked wharves and barracks of the base.

We had so far met no sentry. The Englishman explained that the Germans guarded this base mainly by a submarine which constantly patrolled around the island, thus making any approach by sea or air impossible. The only other detached outpost was in the lookout station hidden in a tree-top at the summit of the ridge opposite to the one we had descended. He could be dealt with later.

The only sentries we would have to cope with immediately, therefore, would be those stationed on the docks and about the barracks. Hunter counted on overcoming them with vapor from a distance before an alarm could be sounded.

AS we came to a halt ready for action, we could make out, through the fringe of trees, the dim shadow of low buildings. Fortunately for our purpose there was no wind, save a gentle land current that bore down through the gulf and out to sea in

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just the right direction to carry our vapor effectively.

It had been agreed beforehand that when all was in readiness the Englishman would whistle softly in imitation of one of the familiar birds of the region. Now we waited breathlessly for the call.

At last it came, each of us discharged his anesthetic sprayer, and after counting ten, as directed, advanced on the buildings.

A few steps ahead I stumbled against a figure leaning against a tree. He made no move, and I knew by the alien feel of his garments that it was one of the barbarians overcome by our vapor.

By the time I had bound this man's hands securely, so smoothly had our plans worked out that the attack was over, and crowned with complete success. While we were locating and binding the sentry, Hunter, accompanied by the Englishman, entered the barracks and overcame the sleeping men within, some two hundred of them. Then the lights were turned on, and before the first of our victims recovered consciousness we had them all securely manacled.

Two of the submarine boats lay by the dock, but cautious investigation showed that there was no one aboard either of them save the single sentry on each of their decks, who, like the rest, were now thoroughly secured.

But this overwhelming of the base itself, simple and complete as it had proven, did not finish our task. There remained the sentry in the lookout tree at the top of the ridge and the patrol boat that might at this very moment be heading into the base.

We, therefore, wasted no time over our present captives, but gagged as well as bound them so that no sentry might give untimely warning to their compatriots with whom we must still cope.

The Englishman took upon himself the task of disposing of the lookout man. He selected one of the curious tubes with which the sentry at the barracks had been armed, a rifle, he called it, and explained briefly its deadly purpose.

Hunter, seeing that he purposed killing in cold blood the unsuspecting man on the hill, expostulated vehemently against such a brutal murder. We all, I confess, looked at our mentor and guide with a new loathing.

But he assured us that this was entirely within the rules of civilized warfare as the Earth-born conceived it. It was that man's life or ours, he insisted. The fellow was due to be relieved soon by the day watch. Once let him suspect, when the relief failed, that all was not well below, and he would signal the patrolling submarine. We would then be slaughtered without hope of defense.

At Hunter's proposal that the anesthetic could be used on this sentry as on the others, he showed that it would be impossible to get near enough to the German to use the sprayer before he discovered his would-be assailant and shot him down.

A rifleman, on the other hand, could climb half way up the slope under the trees and, without exposing himself, get a good shot at the man in the tree.

So Hunter reluctantly consented to the repulsive plan. Before going on his errand the Englishman warned us that we must keep out of sight within the barracks while he was gone. If by lucky chance the patrolling submarine should return during his absence, he said our only hope was that the crew might come ashore unguardedly and put themselves within range of the anesthetic.

I shall never forget the horror of the minutes that elapsed while we waited for the rifle report that would tell us that one human being had calmly executed a death sentence upon another with whom he had no personal quarrel.

We crouched by the barrack window and listened, a cold sweat of horror streaming down our faces. The moments dragged by till it seemed a day must have gone. At the slightest sound of one of our company shifting a cramped foot we all jumped as though each had himself felt the assassin's bullet.

In the meantime it had been growing steadily lighter. Now, by craning our necks from one of the windows, we could just make out the tall, plumed tree on the summit, in which was posted the doomed man, all unsuspicious of the swift end that was creeping upon him up the trail below.

Now the breathless silence was stirred by the distant note of a bird. Another took it up, then another and another, until the air rang with the glad chorus of feathered creatures in greeting to the sun. As we listened its first soft rays glinted across the little harbor and gilded our horror-paled faces. A faint breath of awaking sea breeze fanned us.

Then the forest orchestra seemed to reach a period in its orison, and there came a brief pause. Even the breeze hung suspended a moment as if in expectancy.

And it came! A sharp, rattling report,

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ripping the crisp morning air and re-echoing again and again from hill to hill.

A moment longer we held our breaths, avoiding each other's faces. Then the hurried clattering of the Englishman's footsteps as he raced back down the mountain-trail told us that his gruesome errand was accomplished.

But we had not yet stirred from our cramped positions when from a new direction came a thunderous report, a wailing scream from the air as of a soul in anguish, a rending crash, and another appalling shock in our very ears.

The ground shook under us. One end of the long room in which we stood flew away as if on a mighty wind. We were half buried under a shower of wreckage.

WHAT had happened we knew not nor stayed to see. Before the echo of the first explosion had died away we had fled incontinently by the door opposite to the wrecked end of the room, and fairly falling over each other in our haste, were well within the shelter of the woodland before we stopped.

Hunter had already determined, as soon as we had our captives secure in fact, that the queen was not a prisoner anywhere in the group of buildings, so we had no obligations as far as our party went, but the saving of each man by himself.

I am a little chagrined as I look back, however, to think that after barely having finished censuring the Englishman for his callous attitude toward the lives of his enemies, we had instinctively adopted the same attitude. For in our panic we gave not so much as a fleeting thought to our bound prisoners who lay in the adjoining building helpless to save themselves.

We had no more than achieved the shelter of the woods than the thought of our inhumanity struck us almost simultaneously. One by one we stopped and turned back and then hesitated at the very edge of the wood.

For at that instant had come another stunning report, and another section of the barracks fell in ruins. It was followed almost instantly by another explosion. Out in the channel, perhaps half a mile away, we caught through the trees a flash of flame and saw under it a strange craft lying low in the water, the flash coming from a great gun on its deck.

We recognized it instantly, from its resemblance to the craft lying at the dock, as the dreaded German patrol boat. The Englishman's shot had evidently come too late. The submarine crew had been warned that an enemy was holding their base.

But even as we grasped this fact the Englishman dashed out from the end of the trail, crossed behind the shelter of the ruined barracks and, oblivious of the threatening gun, jumped aboard one of the moored submarines and went below.

For some minutes the cannonading continued and the incoming vessel drew steadily nearer.

Then we witnessed, this time as mere spectators, a repetition of the fate that had overtaken our own vessel. There was the same thunderous explosion, a detonation that made the late cannon reports seem puny by comparison, the same great column of water rising over the doomed vessel. The craft rose half out of the water, then seemed to break in two, and a moment later all traces of her had disappeared beneath the sea.

The Englishman, as we learned later, had sunk her with a torpedo from her sister ship at the wharf.

It was some minutes, however, before we grasped the fact that our danger was over, and came forth to view the ruins and give proper thanks to our rescuer, though even in our gratitude, we could not help shrinking inwardly from this man who committed wholesale murder in such matter-of-fact fashion.

Thus we peaceful men of Venus, greatly against our will, made entry into the great Earth War, in which though we little dreamed it at the time, we were destined to play a part of paramount importance.

Our prisoners we found by the sheerest miracle were unharmed, but thoroughly cowed. They were a group of men so coarse and brutal to our eyes as to make even the Englishman seem refined. They were even shorter than he, and sturdier in build.

The Englishman at once went at them in most browbeating fashion, and by cross-questioning them, one after the other, got much important information.

Hunter was greatly relieved when he was made certain that the queen had not been aboard the destroyed submarine. The prisoners informed us that the woman had been picked up by another submarine that had come in from a raid to reprovision before sailing to a larger base on the Siberian coast to be refitted. Its captain, a certain Von Herdweg, a man of noble family, of whom they stood in great awe, had taken her with him.

They laughingly told how enthralled was

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the noble sailor with his beautiful captive, despite the fact that she overtopped him by a head, was apparently quite able to take care of herself, and treated him in most cavalier fashion.

They had taken her for a barbarian member of some hitherto unknown island race, but were evidently greatly impressed by her beauty and intelligence. Her blindness she had cunningly concealed, a thing she could do quite readily from her long years of going about much in darkness among her eyeless people.

Hunter was, I could see, somewhat chagrined to be told that his cousin had to all appearances been quite ready to accompany the barbarian captain. But this fact in no way deterred him in his determination to follow him up and rescue her.

The Englishman, whose name, Floyd Gresham, we had at last learned to pronounce, was all enthusiam for this course. He was eager to get credit for capturing a submarine base and two boats, and the destruction of another. He saw a chance to add to his exploit the destruction of still another base. But most of all he was determined to get Hunter back to his own country and make available for her use his marvelous anesthetic gas. It suited Hunter's purpose to encourage him in all this.

PREPARATORY to this expedition our own vessel was brought over to the base and our company taught the use of the German guns to defend it against further attack. Hunter prepared a large additional quantity of his anesthetic preparation of added strength, and floating tanks of it were set at the harbor mouth, electrically connected with the base, so that an incoming enemy could be overcome before he could fire a shot.

Hunter was for making the excursion in his own ship, but Gresham convinced him that his vessel would have no chance against the military flying ships of the Germans.

Gresham's plan was to seek the Germans on the main land in the two captured submarines. They would be able to sail right up to this base before its occupants discovered that the boats were not operated by their own crews; then a heavy charge of gas would do the rest.

So, two weeks later, we sailed, with twenty-four of our company, divided among the two boats, together with enough of our prisoners to complete the manning of the boats. Weaver had been left behind, somewhat under protest, to command the base until an English squadron could be sent back to take it over.

The Lady of the South accompanied us perforce, as she absolutely refused to be separated from Hunter.

The details of that frightful voyage are commonplace matter to Earth readers, momentous as they seemed to us. It would make but a tedious account of seasickness and all the excessive discomfort that goes with life on a submarine.

Once we were nearly wrecked by storm. Twice we were attacked by cruisers, once by a Japanese, and once by a British vessel, to neither of whom were we able to prove in time our friendly nature, and we escaped only by diving.

But at length we crept into the hidden base on the Siberian coast and captured it without a struggle, together with ten submarines, practically putting an end to the German menace in the Pacific, a part of the secret history of the great war now revealed for the first time.

The Germans in the base had no suspicions of us till we were at their very wharves. Then we dropped a single shell in their midst, loaded with our potent anesthetic. The rest was a mere detail of making prisoners of unconscious men, and I will not weary you with monotonous repetition.

But again we were baffled in the object of our expedition. The queen and her German captain had departed for Germany on a fast cruiser a month before. Captain von Herdweg had been ordered to home service, and had taken his blind sweetheart with him.

And simultaneously with this disappointment developed another complication that doubled the motive of our search and greatly distracted our long-suffering leader.

Among the prisoners whom we took from the island base to Siberia was another submarien captain. Von Bendstrum by name, a man of striking appearance and in some ways attractive personality, barbarian though he was.

From the first, the Lady of the South, though in no way ceasing her attentions to Hunter, gave much of her time to this man. She explained her interest by the fact that he spoke both English and German, and had offered to teach her the latter language. As we all were seeking every opportunity possible to learn what we could of our new, strange world, this interest of the lady caused no comment.

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But after the excitement of capturing the Siberian base had subsided, and we were in the midst of our chagrin in failing to find the queen, we made a startling discovery.

Under Gresham's direction, the prisoners on our two submarines were being conducted ashore to be held at the base until the Russian authorities could be notified.

To our complete mystification Von Bendstrum was missing.

On the heels of this mystery someone thought to inquire for the Lady of the South. Investigation showed that she, too, was gone.

Though we made diligent search all about the base and extended it into the surrounding territory, later sending an alarm to the Russian secret service, not the slightest trace of them could be found.

And the manner of their escape remained a complete mystery.

SIX months after the mysterious disappearance of the second of the two women of our company of castaways in an alien and barbarous world, Hunter and I ceased for a while from our wandering and fruitless search and took refuge in a little country inn of Switzerland near the German border.

We were completely discouraged by the apparent hopelessness of our quest, deeply disgusted with the general savagery of these murderous Earth people, utterly homesick for the sane, peaceful, unchanging world from which we had come. We were all but ready to abandon the queen and the lady to their fate and return to Venus, forever cured of our ambition to transplant any of the population of that happy world upon this hopeless, unsuitable planet.

Indeed, our rest was a forced one. For the first time in our lives, and for that matter, in the life of any native of Venus in our modern times, save those smitten with extreme old age, we were overcome with physical disability. The mode of living on Venus, together with our highly developed science of disease prevention, had ages ago banished sickness from our planet.

Among these Earth people of almost universal physical uncleanness, irregularity of living, and crude state of medical knowledge, infection and disease ran riot. Only our habitual practices in the elements of sanitary living which we had been taught as a matter of course in early childhood, prevented our succumbing to one of the many deadly plagues that surrounded us. As it was, our systems, unaccustomed to constant changes of temperature and climate, and in no way immunized by generations of infection, as are the Earthborn, fell easy prey to the lesser infections in almost continuous succession—colds, minor fevers, and the like.

Moreover, our nerves, already severely strained by our many adventures, were near to prostration from the constant, daily multitude of changes that are the commonplaces of Earth life in ordinary times, and were greatly aggravated by the conditions of war.

Indeed, most of those of our company who had accompanied us on the submarines as far as the Russian coast were in such physical state on arrival there that they had already lost all interest in further Earth exploration. Several were seriously ill during their brief stay in port. Those who were not were in a state of such constant bewilderment amid the unintelligible hurry and bustle around them, and the jumble of conflicting and unintelligible languages and customs, that they were soon near to nervous prostration.

Not the least of our afflictions was the atrocious Earth food. I have never yet become reconciled to the barbarous eating of animal flesh, however prepared and seasoned. When these Earth people were not eating their unpalatable concoctions, they were seemingly either drinking some poisonous fluid that had the quality of making them for the time being semi-sane, or burning a rank drug, the smoke of which they drew into their nostrils with great gusto.

And mind you, we had not yet been in the actual theater of war. The Earth people at peace were bad enough.

So the rest of our company were quite willing to return to our island on the British cruiser that went with Captain Gresham to take possession of the German naval base there. Hunter deemed it best that they should do so as any considerable number of followers would only hamper his search, particularly if most of them were to become confirmed invalids.

He gratefully accepted my company, however, as he did not wish to be left entirely unfriended, and, moreover, he wished me to continue to keep a record of our voyagings.

We parted with Gresham with a promise

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on Hunter's part to consider the proposition to supply the anesthetic gas to the English government after he had become more familiar with the merits of the great war. So sure was Gresham that we would agree ultimately, however, that he provided us with an abundance of Earth money for all our needs.

He, on the other hand, agreed not to divulge the secret of our strange origin, as Hunter felt that the notoriety would be a hindrance to us.

Before leaving he gave us credentials and letters to Russian officials, and to the representatives of his own and allied governments, describing us as natives of the little known island on which we had landed, having a mixture of English blood, and claiming the protection of the British flag.

By now we could speak an understandable, though very broken English, and could readily account for our ignorance of Earth affairs by our coming from an isolated island.

Nevertheless, we were marked men wherever we went. Though we had adopted European dress, our height and exceeding slimness, together with our delicate, beardless features and extrordinarily light complexions, when compared with any of the varied Earth races, made us everywhere conspicuous.

Moreover, as we progressed, we frequently found ourselves in trouble, through our own blunders or the interference of unfriendly police or officials. In each instance Hunter extricated us by the use of his anesthetic sprayer. Between us we were able to carry on our persons and in our baggage a large quantity of this condensed and highly volatile fluid. Its use made possible the continuance of a quest which I realize now would have otherwise been cut short at the outset.

There persist to this day in various parts of Russia and Germany miracle stories of two "great white men" or "Ghost Men," as we were called in some sections, who, when seized by police or soldiers, utterly vanished in the air, to reappear again at some distant place.

Our entrance into Germany was effected through Switzerland. An official friend of Gresham in the latter country furnished us with new credentials giving us the apparent status of citizens of a land called America, which had then not yet entered the war.

In Germany our course was much more difficult than in Russia. We were forced to make almost constant use of our bewildering anesthetic. We had by now come in contact with individuals of all the chief warring races, but barbarous as they all seemed to us, the rest appeared civilized in comparison with the majority of these bloodthirsty people of Germany.

THE more we saw the so-called Earth civilization, the more we were confused by its marvelous advancement in certain sciences and in mechanical inventions, and the sharp contrast of these developments with their savage ways of living, their savage attitude toward human life, their tyrannous governments, their absurd and contradictory customs and beliefs.

Of their governments I could make nothing. No two seemed alike. All, however, seemed founded on the principle that a few of the more powerful of the people should rule by authority over the many, whereby the few were rich and powerful, and the many lived in poverty and squalor.

I was reminded of the queen's method of ruling in the Land of Night, and of the unhappy state into which she had proposed to thrust Venus.

Of their religious views I could at first make little. I heard much talk of religious matters, a thing unknown in Venus, where we took our common, simple faith for granted. But here there seemed as many opinions as there were people, and each man had worked out for himself a most complicated system.

I soon learned, however, that all worshiped one God, who, to my mind, was none other than our own Great Over Spirit. Christianity, which seemed to be the general name of a vast group of religions, I found on reading its sacred book, was a faith of great beauty and truth, teaching practically the same code of living and worship as practised in Venus.

But when it came to practise, I found these professedly devout Christians curiously inconsistent, particularly among the Germans. One of their chief laws forbade killing, and at the same time all the Earth was engaged in killing as its chief occupation. Another forbade stealing. Yet, apparently, Christian Germany had adopted the profession of killing in order that it might steal as much as possible from its neighbors.

We were vastly sickened of the whole miserable, inconsistent mess.

Then, while we rested in the little mountain inn and digested these impressions, there came to us a report that was to

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change greatly our attitude toward the Earth and its people, and proved an important turning point in our future.

A refugee from Germany stopped at our inn one day and told us a tale of an unfortunate American girl who was being held practically a prisoner in Germany, on the suspicion of acting as a spy for England, despite the fact that her country, America, was not yet in the war. Lately she had learned that her sister, a Red Cross nurse in France, was seriously ill. She was frantic to go to her sister's bedside, but had been unable to move the German authorities.

The story of these unfortunate girls affected us greatly. We had already conceived considerable respect for their country from reports we had heard, and from representatives of the people whom we had met; that is, as much respect as we could well have for an Earth country at that time. In the first place, we heard it called a country of peace. It had kept out of the World War, which to our minds then was a distinct merit. We learned differently later. Then too, we were told that Americans ruled themselves. While they had laws, to be sure, they made them themselves, changed them when they saw fit, and were not too particular at any time about enforcing them.

So the fact that these ladies in distress were Americans rather than that they were women, largely influenced our decision to go to their relief.

There was no time to be lost. The sick sister might die at any moment. Hunter went at the task with his usual simple directness.

First he learned from the refugee the general directions for reaching the place where the lady was held. She was, it seemed, in a garrison town in Belgium, a few miles back of the German line where she had gone to help with the Belgian relief work.

Without further delay, and scarcely pausing for Hunter to outline his plans to me, we packed our bags and took up a position in the main highway near the inn, where there were constantly rushing to and fro those marvelous inventions, automobiles, one of the many forms of ingenius devices by which these restless Earth creatures manage to rush madly about for no reason conceivable to our leisurely, Venus-born minds. Here was an occasion, however, when even we could appreciate them.

Hunter, being as I have already shown of a mechanical turn of mind, had long since learned to drive one of these vehicles.

Now we obtained the use of an excellent one in our emergency by the simple expedient of standing in the middle of the road and forcing the driver of the next car that appeared to slow down to avoid an accident, a caution we had made doubly sure by rolling a fair-sized boulder into the roadway.

In a twinkling we had the occupants of the car, two prosperous-looking men besides the driver, insensible and lying by the roadside. We placed a roll of money in the pocket of one in payment for the car, rolled the obstruction out of the way, and were off toward the German border at full speed.

No German officer could have acted in more highhanded manner, but I doubt if any German officer would have left payment.

An hour later, we had met the challenge of the border guards with a dash of anesthetic in their faces and were rolling swiftly over the highways of Germany.

CHAPTER IX

A GREAT CONVERSION

OUR passage from the Swiss border to the little garrison town in Flanders was a swift one, but punctuated thickly with excitement. Barely a mile did we travel without challenge. It was well that we had with us a large quantity of this anesthetic fluid, for we were forced constantly to resort to it.

In each instance we left behind us superstitious terror at our magical disappearance. But amazement at the unknown could not altogether balk the matter-of-fact German mind. As Hunter had anticipated, the telegraph was brought into play, and we soon found ourselves expected along the route ahead.

Our first intimation of this was when a sentry fired at us on sight, before we could get near enough to use our sprayer.

We countered, however, by a frequent change of routes. We also abandoned our car several times to confuse pursuit, and commandeered a new one each time by the same process as that by which we had acquired the first one, excepting that we quickly gave in to the conventions of Earthly warfare and ceased paying for the borrowed vehicles.

Hunter also increased the strength of his anesthetic so that our victims would

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be in no shape to send an alarm for several hours, and in addition we changed garments with two of our victims each time it was possible.

As it was, bullets twice ripped through the car body and once punctured a tire. On two occasions we were forced to leave the car and hide in the woods, but in each case our pursuers defeated themselves by coming upon us too closely before they saw us, and thus again getting in range of an anesthetic dose.

Nevertheless, we escaped unwounded, and early one evening found ourselves near the object of our search, on a shell-torn road in ravished Belgium.

This was the first time we had actually been in the active war area. In all our previous journeys about Germany we had carefully kept away from the battle-front, as the reports we had from them made intolerable the thought of visiting such scenes of horror.

And at the moment of our arrival the battle madness seemed to be raging at its height. So near were we to the front line that the ground trembled under the continuous explosion of the great guns, and all along the horizon was a continuous flashing of bursting shells. The little town lay in a shallow valley at our feet, and in the waning light we could see a file of fresh troops starting for the trenches. Motors were constantly dashing to and fro, many of them ambulances bearing the wounded back to the hospital.

Graphic as had been the description given us of these scenes, in the presence of the actuality we suffered from momentary faint-heartedness at the thought of braving the very depths of this caldron of hell, our only defense against its destruction contained in a glass jar that one man could carry.

But I had experienced myself the potency of one of those same jars of volatile fluid released in the crowd at East Venus. I took fresh courage from the memory, and with a firm grip on my will prepared for the ordeal. In addition to the milder, temporary anesthetic which we used in our sprayers, Hunter had prepared two jars of the stronger mixture.

One of these, Hunter was confident, when released, would fill all the area of the valley in which the town lay with a gas that would render every living thing in it insensible for hours, unless revived by an antidote.

Now, with one of these in readiness, we drove down the slope toward the town. Being at the time in the uniform of German officers, and driving a military car, we were not challenged till we reached the sentry at the edge of the town, though we passed many soldiers on the way.

Our sprayers silenced the sentry. Then we donned our gas-masks, opened one of the jars and shook its contents into the air about us. We waited until the gas had time to take effect, and then drove down into the town unmolested.

Everywhere lay the bodies of men apparently dead, officers and common soldiers alike for the time being made helpless by our powerful gas.

We had been given a map of the town, together with the location and description of the house in which was interned the lady we sought. After a half-hour's search we found it and made forcible entry.

Outside were the insensible bodies of one old man, a crippled youth, and three women. We had no difficulty in identifying her we sought, not only from the description we had and letters in her room, but from the fact that the other two women were elderly and of the heavier German type with which we had come to be familiar.

If the story of this girl had appealed to me before I saw her, my pity was doubly stirred when I stood in her unconscious presence.

I had hitherto found the women of Earth rather repellent than otherwise. They had seemed to me to be divided into two classes, one group of the type introduced lately into Venus by the Lady of the South, and therefore particularly obnoxious, the clinging sort who practised supposedly seductive charms for the sole purpose of luring men to support them in idleness.

The other species was the domineering kind, more masculine than the males themselves, bent on ruling, the ideal introduced into startled Venus by the Queen of the Night.

To us of Venus, accustomed to regard women simply as human beings and equal companions, differing neither in physical appearance and dress, nor in social duties and privileges from the men, these Earth women, so totally different in every aspect from the males of their species, seemed even less of the human sort than those barbarous beings whom they sometimes sarcastically called their "lords" and "masters."

This latter jest I learned, was an echo of

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an earlier age, when the Earth male really dominated the physically weaker female.

But this girl at first sight impressed me as different. Physically she had the tall, lithe figure of a boy. Her face, too, had an appealing quality of boyish frankness.

She was not exactly beautiful according to the standards of Venus, particularly as exemplified in the unusual persons of the queen and the lady. But she departed less from the type of Venus than did most Earth women I had so far seen. Her tall, slender figure, her pale face and light hair, and her features that for a daughter of Earth were almost delicate, all gave her a physical personality somehow familiar and appealing.

But her eyes, when at length under the influence of restoratives she opened them, were the wonderful, soft, luminous brown never seen on the planet of our birth.

With her first look my heart seemed for and instant to pause; then it leaped violently. She spoke. I never could remember afterward what she said. But with her first words came to me a great revelation.

The guns still thundered in the distance. Brutal Earth men were slaying and being slain by the thousands out there. I was still in the planet I had cursed from the bottom of my heart a thousand times a day.

But in a twinkling it had all changed. It had suddenly become a most interesting world in which I somehow by a strange metamorphosis of soul found myself at home,

At last I had learned the meaning of love.

FROM that moment, without being conscious of it, I seemed, as I realize now, to take the leadership of the expedition. Only one thing mattered, and that was the safety and comfort of this glorious girl, and I was the one ordained to insure it. If I thought of Hunter at all in the matter it was only with a feeling of jealousy lest he, too, share in the glorious emotion that obsessed me.

But of such sentiment on his part, there was no evidence. He was all cool, swift efficiency. If he noticed in any way my new attitude, he did not betray his knowledge.

Our plan of action from this point had been carefully worked out and agreed upon. Everything proceeded without mishap.

We purposed to drive boldly down the valley to the front battle-line, asphyxiating the troops as we went, and, pass directly through the lines into the territory held by the English.

We had devised capes from the robes found in the car to hide our German uniforms at the moment of entering the English lines, and each had a suit of civilian clothes into which we purposed to change immediately afterward. From there on our papers would protect us.

As we proceeded toward the front we soon reached an area where our gas had not extended. Even to our untrained eye it was evident that things were amiss with the Germans.

As we learned afterward, the Germans in this sector had just made a brilliant charge following a terrific artillery duel. They had captured a section of the English trenches and silenced their batteries. To this last fact we owed our immunity from danger from the English fire, which beforehand had worried us not a little.

But now the victors were ready to push forward again, and something had gone awry. Fresh men were expected from the base back of us to help consolidate these gains. The guns demanded ammunition that was due from this same base. Ambulances should have removed the wounded. None of these things had arrived.

We had put an important base out of commission with our gas.

In the confusion and hesitation that resulted we pushed forward over the shell-torn road to the rear trenches. Here we left the car, throwing our capes over our uniforms and discarding our helmets.

Before anyone could molest us, we had opened the second of our deadly jars and scattered its contents.

A few moments later we were threading our way through the labyrinth of communication trenches and across what had lately been the torn and deadly area of no man's land.

We arrived at the new position the Germans had taken before they were overcome by the gas, just as the English had rallied their forces and were about to countercharge. We had climbed to the top of the trench preparatory to dashing across to the English lines when a star-shell burst near by.

A scant fifty yards away a yelling line of brown-clad men were leaping toward us from their trenches. Instinctively we threw our hands in the air and shouted.

I can readily understand that we must have presented a weird and impressive sight to the battle-distorted imaginations of those oncoming men, three tall, robed

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figures, our fair hair shining like halos under the star-shell's glare.

The brown line directly in front of us wavered for an instant. Distinctly to our ears came an awed cry from some one in the ranks:

"The Angels! The Angels!"

Then the others swept them on toward us.

At that we awoke to the peril of our exposed position, and, dropping back into the trenches, took shelter in a dugout while the brown line thundered over our heads.

An hour or more later we were picked up by a patrol well back of the English lines. We told him a fanciful tale of coming up from a channel port in a car which had broken down. We said we had lost our way while searching for the hospital in which the young lady's sister lay ill.

Despite the fact that the hospital was many miles away, our papers satisfied our challengers, and we were presently on our way to our destination in a military car.

But to this day there persist strange legends of the Angels who appeared over the battle-field and encouraged the English troops to retrieve a sharp defeat and hold their line from further German advance. These tales are many and various, but the standard version of the story, though giving a somewhat different time and location to the incident, is so near to the account of our actual experience that I have always been convinced that we unwittingly furnished the foundation of the legend of "The Angels of Mons."

LITTLE did Hunter and I realize when we started out on our chivalrous adventure, having as its purpose the rescue of Margaret Fanwood and her reunion with her sick sister Elizabeth, that we were destined to spend three long years amid the tragic scenes of this Earth war.

We would have been even more amazed had we been told that we would spend those years there willingly, and in the end play an all-important part in bringing that terrible conflict to its close.

We arrive at the base hospital to find Elizabeth Fanwood at the crisis of her illness, to which, happily, the arrival of her sister gave a favorable turn, and she was soon on the road to recovery.

Elizabeth and Margaret were twin sisters, and, with the former restored to health, I defy the casual stranger to tell them apart. I have described Margaret. For the reader to know Elizabeth, he has only to turn back to my introduction of Margaret.

But to the clairvoyant vision lent me by my new-born love there was no such confusion of identity. I readily concede that Elizabeth is an estimable and attractive girl, but have never yet ceased to wonder that from the start Hunter seemed to be more drawn to her than to Margaret, a fact, to be sure, for which I was devoutly grateful.

I had no reason to believe, however, that he entertained for her a feeling similar to my interest in her sister.

AS TIME wore on, indeed, my devotion became a source of misery rather than of happiness. My sober sense told me of its hopelessness. I could, no more than Hunter, conceive of union with an alien Earth maiden. Abhorrent was the thought of wedding one of Venus not of our own clan.

Yet I could not tolerate the thought of leaving her. I was secretly relieved, therefore, when Hunter again got into communication with Gresham and learned from him that the secret service of all the allied powers had taken up our search for the queen and the lady, and that we might better remain in France or England and await their reports, as we could not accomplish anything on our own account.

He did not make it clear to us why these great nations were so concerned over the whereabouts of the missing members of our party. Indeed, we ourselves had about given them up for dead. But we were too unfamiliar with the relative values of Earth affairs at that time to be impressed by the strangeness of this interest. We rather attributed it to Gresham's hope that he could eventually induce Hunter to give up the secret of his powerful gas.

But Hunter, though often importuned by this English officer, who had been promoted for his exploits in the Pacific to an important post in the home office, could not yet bring himself to take active part in this Earth quarrel. He still held it our duty to return to Venus as soon as we were successful in rescuing our two missing women.

So we compromised by taking up a work of mercy in one of the Salvation Army huts near the base hospital where the Fanwood sisters were employed.

And as time went on we began, at first unconsciously, to take sides in the war. The French and English and Belgians,

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once we come to know them well, proved far less barbarous than all Earth people had at first seemed. We came to understand that they were engaged in this horrible butchery against their will, against a race of outlaw barbarians who sought to destroy them. The terrible sufferings of these people appealed more and more to our sympathies and aroused more and more our hatred for the Germans.

Then, too, as the Fanwood sisters told us of their native land of America, we began to realize that the peoples of the Earth were striving for the ideals that were our birthright in Venus. And in some respects we had to concede that there were things we could profitably learn from them and as profitably transplant in Venus on our return there.

At this point in our education a report from Gresham renewed our interest in startling fashion in our search for the queen and the Lady of the South.

The Russian revolution had just taken place. But in the midst of the rejoicing over the overthrow of the Czar of that country, the secret service had unearthed evidence that there was on foot a deep-laid and obscure plot to make the revolution of advantage to certain unknown seekers for power.

A sect called the Bolsheviki had been formed. Their principles, when we learned them, reminded us strongly of the system of society without laws that had worked so peacefully in Venus. But we knew now enough of the nature of the Earth people to agree that such a system could never work here. Nor did we believe it possible that such an idea could have originated in an earthly brain.

This conviction gained strength when Gresham reported that the apparent originator of this plot was an unknown woman who had in her power a renegade German officer. These two, keeping behind the scenes with figureheads in the foreground, proposed to take control of all Russia.

Meantime there were hints of a plot in Germany similarly bred by a woman and an unknown German nobleman. This pair proposed to overthrow the Kaiser and seize even more autocratic power than he had held, under the pretense of giving Germany a people's government. They proposed to wait till the present German power had conquered the Allies, then seize the power themselves, and by acting in cooperation with the Russian conspirators, rule the world.

These plotters could not be located or positively identified, but from bits picked up here and there, Gresham was convinced, as he had suspected for some time, that they had to deal, in Germany, with our Queen of the Night, and in Russia with the Lady of the South.

After Hunter and I had carefully gone over the evidence, there was not the slightest doubt in our minds that Gresham was correct.

We sat up long into the night debating this astounding news. These two women who had so nearly wrecked Venus must needs try their ambitious schemes on another planet, this time working together. The queen had evidently recovered her sight, and with it all her mad ambitions. The lady had meantime fallen under her spell.

Here was the complex dilemma. We had saved Venus by removing these women from the planet. Must we now save the Earth in the same way? If so, where would we take these troublesome females next? If back to Venus, then that planet would be in worse case than before.

Meantime it was still an academic question, for we knew not where to lay our hands on these women. And two long, disastrous years were destined to pass before we obtained that knowledge.

My readers know too well to need repetition what happened in those two years, as far as open history is concerned—how Germany pressed her victories till it seemed indeed that she was about to swallow the world; how peaceful America was at last forced into the struggle when it appeared too late to stem the tide.

The Lady's Bolshevik plot in Russia became a hideous success. The queen's machinations in Germany ripened to the point where it was ready to break forth the moment the expected triumph of the German arms was certain.

In this crisis Gresham sent for us to come at once to London.

His message was so urgent that we complied, and met him two days later in the London headquarters of the secret service.

This was the substance of what he told us: it had just been learned that the queen and the lady and their male partners were to meet shortly in an obscure village on the Baltic Sea to complete their plans for the subjection of the world. Though the Germans were now apparently in retreat, that was a part of the queen's plot. She would use the panic at home to overthrow the Kaiser's government, and on the in-

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stant the renewed armies of Germany, re-enforced by Russia, would turn on the Allies and destroy them.

The Baltic conference must be broken up; Hunter and his flying-ship alone could do it.

Hunter paced the floor for a few moments in deep thought. When he spoke, Gresham and I both gasped in astonishment.

"I will stop that conference," he said, "if I have to kill both those women. Moreover, I will destroy the German nation so that it will never again trouble the Earth."

ONE dark night early in the fall of 1918, our flying-ship, repaired and once more in working order, with Hunter again in command, and all our party on board save the two still missing women, hovered high over the retreating German battle-line at the pivotal point on the western front.

Immediately after Hunter's desperate decision to destroy the German people, we had left England on a swift cruiser bound for our deserted island in the Pacific. We had arrived there to find all our band still alive and slowly becoming acclimated to Earth surroundings, but terribly home-sick for Venus, and loud in their expressions of joy at the prospect of returning thither.

We had brought with us on the cruiser all the necessary supplies for stocking our ship for the great home voyage through space. In a day's time we were ready for the departure.

But first we must perform the tragic errand which now found us poised in mid-air back of the German lines.

Now at a word from Hunter a great jar of strong anesthetic fluid was dropped over the rail. Then with gasmasks adjusted we slowly sank to the ground. For the dropping of the gas was only the beginning of our campaign.

Our ship was now equipped with machine-guns from the cruiser to ward off any attack from German airplanes. But due to the darkness, and the fact that we were well back of the line of the air patrol, we had no such adventure.

When our ship touched the ground Hunter came forth from the motor cabin swathed from head to foot in white gauze, with rubber gloves on his hands, and a mask over his face. In his hands he carried a small glass jar.

He left the ship alone and was gone for about an hour. What he did during that time he never told anyone but myself.

Ages ago, in Venus, before our scientists completed the elimination of disease, there broke out a deadly plague which killed every victim it attacked and spread with terrible rapidity. It was at last conquered, and its germ absolutely eradicated, save as scientists kept and cultivated it in their laboratories so that succeeding generations of doctors might be familiar with it in case the plague ever revived.

Hunter had brought with him on the ship a jar of these germs, with the idea in mind that in our search for a new world we might find a region inhabited by fierce beasts that could best be eradicated by use of these germs.

Now his purpose was to treat the German people as he had planned to treat these hypothetical beasts.

Accordingly he had taken his jar with him on this night and smeared these germ cultures on the faces of a score or more of the soldiers who lay unconscious from our gas.

All Earth readers remember the terrible plague that started in Germany in the fall of 1918, and swept over the Earth. Your doctors called it Spanish influenza. It was in reality the plague of Venus, started by Hunter in and attempt to wipe out the German people.

That he failed in destroying that people, of course, you know. He could not foresee that the difference of constitution between the men of Venus and Earth rendered the disease less deadly with the latter. But, for all that, this plague had a terrible effect on this war-stricken population. It has been believed by many that the influenza epidemic in reality was the final blow to the morale of the German people and really stopped the war.

It was a source of lasting remorse with Hunter, however, that he had not foreseen the spread of the plague to other nations, whereby thousands of lives he had never meant to take were sacrificed to the all too deadly scourge.

But in little over an hour after our landing in Germany our task there was completed, and we were on our swift way through the air to the Baltic village where the momentous conference between international and interplanetary conspirators was taking place.

I took that last Earth voyage with sinking heart.

It meant to me that I was soon to leave behind a world which now held all that was to me most dear.

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I had not had the courage to bid a final farewell to Margaret Fanwood. Indeed, when Hunter and I had departed for England at Gresham's call, we had not seemed to realize that it meant a permanent parting.

I HAD up to that moment never avowed my hopeless love. But we must have felt at that parting some premonition that it was for more than a matter of days. I had started to bid her a formal farewell when my emotions flew out of control. I swept her into my arms and declared my love, and had the brief rapture of hearing her avow hers in turn. Then I parted from her abruptly without pledge and without hope. Now I realized that it was better that I had never seen her again. It could have meant only pain for us both.

I was so absorbed in these bitter reflections that I hardly realized when we reached our rendezvous. Hunter called me to the deck and pointed down to a little huddle of buildings on the shore of a great sea.

Through our telescope, another Earth contrivance that we had added to our ship, we could make out a streamer of white flying from a window of one of these buildings. It meant that this was the house where the conference was to take place. It was the signal agreed upon with the spy who had worked his way into the confidence of the conspirators only to betray them, another despicable Earth custom, of which perforce we must make use.

We dropped down a little nearer to the village, and then once more, for the last time on Earth, made use of a jar of our anesthetic fluid that had played such an important part in the destinies of two worlds.

A few minutes later we descended into a lifeless village and made our way to the house with the white streamer.

In a barricaded basement we found the four conspirators senseless over a table around which they had apparently been settling the affairs of the world.

When we restored the two women to consciousness, to our surprise they seemed relieved and delighted to see us, rather than chagrined as we had supposed.

"Oh! Take us back to Venus! Take us back to Venus!" were the queen's first words as soon as she was able to speak. Then, seeing her still unconscious male companion, she turned white and rushed to him with a cry of alarm.

"Oh! He isn't dead! He mustn't be!"

"He is all right I'll bring him around as I did you, as soon as we decide what to do," Hunter said.

The Lady, who had shown the same fear as to her own companion, looked up at this.

"There is only one thing to do. Go back to Venus! she said. "We have learned our lessons, and we are cured. Let us go back."

"I don't understand," Hunter said at length, turning to the queen. "My cousin, is this another trick to hoodwink me again? How about your great conspiracy to rule the world? We know all about it and came here to stop it."

"We came here to stop it, too," was her amazing reply. "I once wanted to rule Venus. Then when I came to this Earth and thought Venus was destroyed, I began planning how I should rule the Earth. Then when he took me away with him, and I learned to love him and he made me his wife, I saw my opportunity. He was ambitious, and I spurred him on.

"Meanwhile the Lady had loved and fled with another ambitious man, a friend of my husband's. When they were students together they planned some day to win power together. In Russia he saw his opportunity, and in her the one to help him.

"So each pair of us plotted, and finally got together again. But I have been overfed with the sight of the terrible power I once coveted. I see now how dangerous and evil it is; how it had nearly ruined this Earth, how it would completely ruin it if our plans went through.

"We tried to persuade our husbands just now to drop it all, but they would not. Can't you save us? And in saving us save the Earth?"

"But how about these men, your husbands?" asked Hunter doubtfully. "They will be left behind to go on with your conspiracy."

"No!. No!" cried both women in chorus. "We can't go without them!"

"Can't the custom of Venus be changed to let us keep husbands not of our clan?" demanded the lady. "Was I so far wrong in my old ideas? Many of the women wished it.

"I see now how foolish I was in my attempt to make men support women in idleness. What I have seen of that on Earth has cured me. Let me go back and undo the mischief I wrought in Venus with that false notion.

"But let me teach the people of Venus that love is free of clan. Love has come

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to Venus at last, and not any custom can stop it!"

Hunter smiled in responsive sympathy.

"I think you are right!" he said at last. "Perhaps I can persuade my father to use his influence to change the custom. I see things differently now."

SOME hours later, when the ship was once more in the air and the two couples were in their staterooms, the wives beginning the long process of consoling their imperial-minded husbands for their lost Earth, I approached Hunter, who was alone in the motor-cabin. A faint hope was knocking at my heart.

"Hunter," I said, "when you absolved the queen and the Lady for marrying out of their clans, did you mean it to apply only to them?"

He eyed me quizzically.

"Just what do you mean, Scribner?" he demanded. "Have you by any chance someone in mind whom you'd like to carry back to Venus?"

"No!" I said, emboldened by his manner. "I have someone, whom I want to stay on Earth with; someone whom I know would never be happy in our strange world of Venus. For to most people it is not given to adapt themselves to any other world than the one of their birth. I can be happy here with the woman I have learned to love."

"So you, too, have learned what real love means? The Earth has been a great educator!" was all he said.

"I can scarcely bear the thought of leaving you, old friend," I went on. "Will you think I am a deserter?"

"I will not let you desert me," he said sharply. "For if you desert me, you will have to desert my sister-in-law, and I won't have a relative of mine treated so.

"I mean that just before we went to England to meet Gresham the old chaplain at the base hospital was good enough to marry me to the finest little lady in two worlds, formerly Miss Elizabeth Fanwood. I'm on my way back to France now to join her. If you care to stop off and console Margaret for the loss of a sister, you have my blessing.

"I have arranged it all with Weaver," he went on. "The gruff old sea-dog's heart is broken, but he is somewhat reconciled by the fact that neither the queen nor the Lady has caught me. He will drop us in France, in the night, without the knowledge of the rest, and then go on to Venus. I've written a long letter to my father which will reconcile him, and start some needed reforms in Venus.

"Scribner, old friend, once we pined for change. We got many changes that we didn't find so alluring at close range. But I think now we have found something changeable that will fascinate us to the end. For what is more changeable than the ways and moods of an Earth maiden?

"At the same time we've found something that is unchangeable, yet will never weary us with its monotony.

"For each of us, Scribner, there is a world of never change, the heart of the woman that is waiting for him in France."

ON THE NEWSSTANDS!

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THE THROW-BACK

By L. R. Sherman

A LOG fire roared in the fireplace, its fitful light playing over the strong face of my companion. Outside, the shrieking wind, the crash of thunder, the flare of lightning, the chill rain beating on roof and window pane, as though daring us to face its fury, served to accentuate the warmth within. Around the log walls the mounted heads, trophies of peak and forest, seemed in the uncertain light to lift and listen as though the wings of the storm had reborn in them the spirit of the wild.

As I watched my companion's face a change came over it. Something out of the storm seemed to have taken possession of him. He no longer gazed reflectively into the fire's heart. His eyes glowed fiercely, his hands gripped the chair until the knuckles gleamed white through the tan, his dark, seamed face showed tense beneath his white hair. He was living over again some long past adventure.

My mind turned back over the fifteen years I had known him, and I recalled that never a spring had passed that the call of the wild did not claim him; that he did not leave the easy, comfortable club life of the city and wander off alone into the mountains.

Born to one century, child of another, he wandered lost, until a weird summons came to him across the ages, and his soul leaped, exultant, to meet the most ancient challenge of all. . . .

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He was nearly seventy years old, and during his youth this wanderlust must have led him into far places and shown him strange sights.

The storm passed, leaving behind a gentle rain pattering on the roof, as though to make amends, to soothe the storm-strained nerves. The old man relaxed; the light in his eyes died down, and, becoming conscious of my scrutiny, he turned to me and smilingly answered my unspoken question.

"Yes, Bob, I have been living in the past. The shrieking wind and driving rain took me back over twoscore years and brought before my eyes a picture of bygone days. I was in a wild country of deep canyons and towering mountains, and another battle of the elements was on. I saw the fighting blood of my partner—as queer a partner as man ever had—rising to meet the challenge of the storm. I felt the portent of a strange adventure coming with the night, and for a moment the chill dread of the unknown took strong hold of me. Bob, I am minded to tell you a tale of my youth, so wild, so weird, so unbelievable as to appear almost the ravings of a madman.

"It is a story that for nearly half a century I have never mentioned, for fear of being considered either mad or a liar."

He paused, and again his eyes sought the glowing coals.

"Another lightning flash, and I saw him raise his club to strike. . . ."

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"Tell me; I will not misunderstand," I said softly, hardly daring to breathe, lest the spell be broken and he lose the impulse to unlock his secret.

He nodded slowly, but sat silent for so long I was afraid he had again given up to reverie. Then—

THE spring of 1873 found me prospecting for gold in the Sierra Madre, in as wild and rugged a country as it has ever been my experience to travel.

About a month prior to the main events of this story I had come upon Bull, lying in a canyon with one leg broken, and several ribs cracked. He had been trying to climb the almost perpendicular wall when a brush to which he had trusted his weight gave way, giving him a nasty fall. It was not until some time later he confided to me that he had heard me coming and, wanting to be let alone, had endeavored to take the quickest way out.

I managed to set his leg, and brought him around in good shape, and from that time until his death I never had a friend more staunchly true. Whence he came and where he was going I never knew. He attached himself to me, saying simply that I had been good to him and he would go with me. He said his name was Bull, and if he ever had another he never said so.

I never did know who he was, and not until years later—after some delving as an amateur into anthropology and some of its allied sciences—did I begin to understand him, to appreciate the fact that I had had as a partner one of nature's rarest abnormalities—a throw-back, a reversion to type, a man born fifteen thousand years after his time.

Imagine a man with the long arms, the deep, thick chest, and the enormous strength of one of the larger anthropoids. Add to this an indescribable restlessness, an overpowering urge to physical action during a storm, increasing in direct proportion to its violence, and you have a brief mental picture of Bull, the fruit of atavism.

I have watched him by the camp fire grow uneasy at the approach of a storm and with the first crash of thunder and downpour of rain disappear in the dark and remain until its fury was spent. I remember one night in particular, when one of the worst electric storms I have ever witnessed caught us in the mountains. With the thunder ceaselessly crashing and reverberating through the canyons, and the lightning playing incessantly over the sky, I saw Bull grasp a sapling, wrench it out by the roots, and break off the top. Gripping the base as one would a club, he disappeared beyond the firelight to return some hours later covered with blood and with the skin of one arm torn almost to ribbons. The next day about half a mile from camp we passed a dead grizzly with his skull crushed in.

Day by day we wandered deeper into the mountains, following no trail, but travelling generally to the southwest. Occasionally we would spend a day or two examining a likely-looking ledge or panning the gravel along a promising stream. We were content to take our time, varying our diet of pay-streak bacon and bannock with an occasional feast of venison or grouse.

One evening, supper over and our horses hobbled for the night, I was smoking my last pipe, and Bull, in a characteristic attitude, squatted just beyond the firelight with his head on his knees, gazing into the coals. Knocking out the ashes, I looked up, about to suggest that we turn in, but Bull was not there. I had heard no sound, nor seen any movement, yet he had disappeared almost before my eyes. He had heard something I had not, and had gone to investigate. So I thought as I rose to go to my blankets.

A twig snapped behind me, and instinctively I whirled. Advancing into the firelight with right hand over his head, palm toward me, was a young Yaqui. Behind him, just at the edge of the fire-glow, Bull squatted on the ground as though he had never moved. The lad stoically accepted the tobacco I offered him, and we smoked for some minutes. Finally he said:

"Me, I hate greaser—white man kill greaser, me friend of white man. White man not go farther this way. Bad!"

Bull looked at him queerly.

"Why bad?" he asked.

"Evil spirits. Bad, much bad, enemy all living things. All time kill. Indian, white man, all animal—go into valley, never come back. Me friend of white man. See fire, white man's fire. Come tell not go."

I tried to find out the location of this hidden valley, but he either could not or would not say. He said sometimes one could hear the "call", that one who heard it, unless he wore a charm, would have to follow. He had never heard it, but his grandfather, who had worn the snake charm, had heard it, and had saved himself by running many miles. He had that charm, he said.

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To make light of his superstition would have wounded his pride, for he sincerely believed in it and had gone out of his way to warn us. My companion seemed strangely impressed with the tale, and his eyes never left the youth. I persuaded the lad to stay with us that night with the promise of much bacon and coffee for breakfast, and so we stretched out, feet to the fire, and were soon dead to the world.

You know, Bob, that a man living in the wilds for months at a time will instinctively awaken some time between twelve and two o'clock, possibly stir up the fire a bit, or maybe just look around, dimly realizing that everything is still for the moment, and then turn over and go to sleep again. This night I awakened suddenly from a sound sleep to full consciousness and found myself sitting up. The fire had died down to a small bed of coals. The stars gleamed coldly overhead, enhancing the blackness of the tall pines rising in battalions above us on the mountainsides. No breath of air stirred; no living thing moved; the silence was absolute.

And yet—was that a sound—or was it but an impression on some supersensitive auditory nerve? I cannot describe the sensation.

I can only say that it gave to me the impression of an exhaled breath in a long-drawn rising and falling cadence. I felt a chill, a nameless fear, take hold of me, and become conscious that I was bathed in cold perspiration. Then I looked across at Bull, and knew it was not imagination. He had heard what I had not.

He stood, half-crouched, his long arms half crooked and extended slightly forward, with his hands clawlike, his eyes staring straight ahead. My own muscles involuntarily contracted at the sight of his tense, strained position. Then he relaxed, shook himself as though throwing off a noxious covering, glanced at me, and lay down again to sleep. I looked to where our visitor slept, but he had chosen a spot a little apart, and in the darkness I could not pick him out.

IT WAS some time before I finally composed myself and dropped off to sleep. I slept fitfully and rested but little. Once or twice during those moments of half wakefulness I seemed dimly to realize that Bull, lying just on the other side of the dead fire, was tossing and muttering in his sleep. Finally I dropped into the sound, dreamless slumber of a healthy man and did not awaken until it was quite light. Bull already had the fire going and was cooking breakfast.

Daylight put an entirely different aspect on the matter, and I was convinced that I had had a particularly vivid nightmare. Then I discovered that our Indian had departed some time during the night, and his tracks on the bank of the creek showed that he had been running *hard*.

Breakfast was eaten slowly and in silence. The ponies were packed and everything was in readiness to move, yet I hesitated. Something held me—an indescribable feeling made me long to turn back; that most potent of fears, the fear of the unknown, gripped me and told me that ahead was a danger such as no man of our time had ever known. With a start I came out of my day dream and, cursing myself for a superstitious young fool, swung into the saddle and gave the word to start.

Bull, already mounted, had been watching me closely, for he seemed to understand better than I did what was going on inside of me, and when I gave the word to start he touched the lead horse lightly and we went on up the valley without a word. I was lost in thought and paid but subconscious attention to the surroundings as I travelled.

Gradually I became conscious that all was not right with our little cavalcade, and then I noticed that Bull was not himself. He rode slumped forward with his head upon his chest, his whole being seeming to give off a kind of despair. Even his broncho seemed affected by the attitude of its master and plodded along with head down. I pulled up alongside of him and asked if he were ill. He gave me a queer look out of the corners of his eyes and shook his head.

"No," he said; "but this will be my last ride. I know. I have much to think about, and it is sometimes hard to think."

Then my nerves snapped, and I berated him for a fool.

"Are you going to believe the superstitious nonsense of a savage?" I concluded. "Do you actually believe that wild tale of an evil spirit, a 'call' which brings living things to it to be devoured? I credited you with more sense."

"This is not a spirit," he said. "I can almost tell you what it is. I have strange dreams at night, of other lands and other people like myself and yet not like me, and of animals not like any you ever knew. I have been thinking. I must have lived before, some time long ago, and the dreams

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are my memories. So I know what we go to, and I will not come back."

This was the longest speech I had ever heard Bull make, and, after all, might there not be something in what he said about his dreams? I was silent. Inconceivable as it was that his dreams of a prehistoric existence could have anything to do with our present experience, he believed them, and it was not for me to scoff at his beliefs. It was significant that neither of us mentioned the experience of the night.

We had camped at the entrance to a valley and, continuing up this valley as the morning wore on, the character of the country gradually changed. The sides of the valley steepened and the floor narrowed until it assumed the aspect of a deep canyon. Mountains rose on all sides, towering above us like mighty sentinels of that wild, untamable land. Their dim, pine-clad slopes showed darkly; their forests pregnant with the mystery of unknown wild life that thrived in their dim aisles. The canyon continued to narrow until it seemed as though it must soon end in the convergence of its two walls.

About nine o'clock Bull, who was ahead, dismounted and beckoned me to come forward. I went to where he knelt looking at something on the ground, and saw him examining, in the soft loam near a little spring, the largest grizzly track I have ever seen.

"Made yesterday," said Bull, after noting for a moment the condition of the water which had settled in the heel impressions.

The hunting instinct was aroused in both of us, and Bull, who was never more happy than when on a game trail, started forward on foot. We travelled for some distance, when I saw light through the trees, as though the floor and walls of the valley had been cut off, leaving nothing but empty space ahead of us. When we came to this point I saw that such was indeed the case.

ALMOST directly at our feet, about five hundred feet below, was as beautiful a little pocket in the mountains as I have ever beheld. It was about two miles square. Covered with rich grass and thickly dotted with groves of willow and cottonwoods, with a little stream winding in and out among the groves, and disappearing almost directly below us into some underground cavern, it looked like a veritable paradise surrounded by great, forbidding cliffs. At our feet was a trail leading to our right across the face of the cliff. It was little more than a narrow ledge, but it led to the valley and must have been used by our quarry.

Bull stood looking down into the little cuplike pocket. His actions and his expression seemed to speak of a shrinking, stomach chilling fear as he drew back from the edge.

Turning to me, he said in a low, half choking voice:

"It lives here. This is the place."

"Well, go ahead then. What are you afraid of? We need that skin for moccasins," I cried impatiently.

"I mean the Yaqui's evil spirit," he replied.

"Rot—if you're afraid, stay here. I'm going down to get that bear."

I started forward, but Bull gripped me by the shoulder.

"If you go, I go, and I go first," he said simply.

Shaking himself, as I had seen him do that night, he bent his eyes to the trail once more and started on the perilous descent. Leading my horse, and with the packhorses last, I cautiously negotiated the first hundred yards of the trail and found that it gradually widened a little so that, though there was little chance of falling over the edge, there was danger of falling under the horses' hoofs. Bull was already down, and, unable to stop had I wanted to, I finally reached the bottom amid an avalanche of gravel from the feet of the sliding horses behind me.

"Bear's not far off. We'd better make camp now," said Bull.

His attitude of assuming the leadership did not annoy me. Instead, for once I was glad to shift the responsibility. For some unaccountable reason a change had come over me. I was not so sure of myself, now that I was down. I did not like this little pocket: it was too inviting; the sun shone too brightly on, too luxuriant vegetation; the forbidding walls hemming it in gave me the feeling of being trapped, and I was already beginning to regret the impulse that made me ignore the warnings I had received. Had it not been for a foolish, boyish pride, I should have suggested we leave the place immediately.

Mounting his horse, Bull followed the left wall searching for a suitable place to camp. There were several spots with springs and excellent forage for the horses, which seemed ideal to me, but none of these got a second look from him. Keeping close to the cliffs, we had travelled for

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perhaps a mile when we came to where a slight break in them formed a little pocket about twenty feet square. In a corner of this pocket a spring of clear, cold water boiled in the sandy bottom of a little depression. Here Bull chose to camp. He unsaddled the horses and threw the packs into the far end of the break.

A thick growth of scrub oak grew along the base of the cliffs, and while I unpacked and started to make a lunch he took the axe and cut wood. He stopped only when I called him to eat. The meal over, he directed me to take an axe and help. I started to protest that more than enough was already cut; but with a curt, "It's my party now; we need it all," he started to cut more wood. We did not stop for an hour, and then only when he had cut enough to last a week—so it seemed to me.

Not content with this, he directed me to help him cut down a grove of large cottonwoods which grew a short way from camp. Without trimming them, we dragged them in with the aid of the horses, and at Bull's direction formed such an impenetrable barrier around our camp as would have defied an elephant to break through.

Bull, seeming to work against time, did feats of strength that day which I firmly believe will never be equaled by any man. Leaving me to handle the horses, he would lift great trunks and pile them high up overhead, bracing them with other trees placed at right angles. Only when the entrance to our camp was completely surrounded and a small entrance cut through the barrier, low down, did he quit.

The afternoon was well advanced when we finished, but Bull, taking his rifle, suggested we see what had become of the grizzly. Tying the horses outside the barrier and close to the cliff, we proceeded on foot and were soon on the trail. We had travelled about a mile when we came upon the scene of what must have been such a battle of great beasts as this earth has not witnessed since that far off time when the giant saurians fought amid the slime and ooze of some long covered marsh of the Jurassic period.

Blood covered everything, blood and now and again a strip of flesh with the long brown, silver-tipped hair of the grizzly clinging to it. The sod was torn up over a strip a hundred yards long. From what could be made out of the tracks the bear must have been trying to flee, but was overtaken time and again and forced to fight. And such a battle as he must have put up!

But his conqueror—what sort of a monster must it have been to cause a grizzly, the most fearless of wild animals, to take flight, force him to turn and fighting in desperation for his life, to be conquered!

There were two inexplicable facts to be read from the spoor. One was the tracks of the conqueror, great five-toed tracks, not ending in sharp claws like a large bear's foot, but blunt with a likeness to the toes of an elephant. The other astonishing fact was our failure to find the grizzly. The tracks of the bear ended in a fifty square foot piece of torn sod and blood, but those of the monster kept on unbroken.

The obvious deduction was that the unknown must have carried the body with him. What manner of animal must it be that would carry an animal as heavy as a grizzly to its lair rather than feed on it where it lay? Surely some night-seeing beast who dreaded the light more than the tremendous effort of carrying a ton of meat several miles.

COMING to the end of the battleground, Bull stood for a few moments, gazing at the cliffs toward which the tracks led, then turning, he said, "Come back," and hurried toward camp.

Arriving at the latter he displayed one the few signs of affection I had ever seen him show. Unfastening the horses he took off the ropes which held them, and then going up to his own, a wiry buckskin bronco, a marvel of strength and endurance, he caught its head in his hands and looked into its eyes, saying nothing. Yet understanding seemed to be there, for the bronco, with a soft whinny, stretched its head forward and softly caressed Bull's cheek with its lips.

We left the horses outside and entered our inclosure. Telling me to start a fire and cook supper, Bull took an axe and disappeared. In half an hour he was back again with an enormous oak club which would have taxed my strength to swing around my head a minute.

"What's the matter with your rifle?" I asked.

"Gun's not worth a damn now," was all he would say.

After supper he raked the coals together and proceeded to case-harden the club by turning it over and over in the coals. By the time it was thoroughly blackened and hardened to his liking, it was quite dark and, rising, he threw wood on the fire until a blaze was built which drove me back into our retreat.

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I realized now why he had cut such a mountain of wood and built such an impenetrable barricade, but I never understood, nor ever can understand, how he had the foresight to prepare for what I never imagined, even in my wildest dreams, could exist. That there would be no sleep this night I well knew. The fire must be kept roaring at all costs, for no wild animal ever existed that would come into firelight at night. They would be attracted to it and watch it from without the sphere of its glow, but they would never enter that glow.

Tired as I was, a nervous excitement drove all thoughts of sleep from my mind. The night was clear and cold, and the warmth of the large fire not unwelcome. From where I sat I could see above us, miles away, three snow-capped peaks gleaming coldly in the starlight, and the thought came to me that this was not our earth we were on, but some far distant planet where life, still in its youth, was slowly evolving from broad generic types. This thought grew on me as I looked at Bull squatting on the ground, gazing into the fire, and I did not have to stretch my imagination much to picture in him the direct precursor of man.

Seated thus before his protecting fire, in a long lost day, he saw pictures in the flames, seeming oblivious to all around him, yet his senses recording accurately the faintest taint in the breeze, the most minute sound out of the night. Would I be privileged to witness one of those most decisive battles of a new world, when man in the making, with the crudest of artificial weapons, fought the brutes of his time?

When we know that some of our reptiles, such as certain of the lizards, the great marine turtles, and the crocodiles, have come down to us, with but little change, from the middle of the Secondary Era, would it be stretching the imagination too much to believe that in unexplored portions of the earth some of nature's first mammals had managed to adapt themselves to the slowly changing conditions and to come down through the ages from the latter part of that same period?

Then my thoughts turned to my old acquaintances who so little understood my restlessness. How immeasurably far off were the streets of the great cities with their brilliantly lighted cafes, their crowded theaters, and their beautifully gowned and bejeweled women, and suave, well-dressed men. How many among them, in their hectic hunt for excitement, could have pictured two such strangely contrasted beings facing such a situation as now confronted us?

Gradually the pictures faded; I became conscious of a feeling of unrest, and then I noticed that Bull no longer resumed his meditative gazing into the flames each time he had added fuel to the fire, but was constantly shifting his eyes from one point of the barrier to another. He, too, was growing restless. I looked at my watch and found it was after eleven. Could it be I dreaded the approach of that hour, which the night before had ushered in the new day, and with it that strange feeling of an unheard call? Had the call emanated from this little pocket in the bowels of the mountains? Would we hear it again this night and learn its source? My companion's attitude told me that he expected it and I had good cause to believe his instincts to be accurate.

Shortly before twelve a faint breeze blew toward us from up the valley and he slowly arose, head thrust forward into the breeze. You have seen a dog testing the wind, nose thrust out, inhaling in a series of short, sharp breaths and exhaling with a soft snort. That is what Bull was doing. Turning to me, he said shortly:

"It's coming."

He threw more wood on the fire and came back into the recess beside me. As the flames leaped up we could see the horses growing restless and finally they wheeled and galloped up the valley, all but one. We could just see Bull's buckskin stand trembling in every limb, staring terror-stricken into the dark. Then with a snort he wheeled and leaped straight toward us. He came down in the midst of the barrier and after a good deal of threshing and plunging he managed to extricate himself and turned, trying to follow the others. Something in his gait, as he disappeared in the dark, showed us that he had hurt himself and could go no faster than a slow hobble.

Hardly had he disappeared when the soft padding of some heavy animal came to us.

Suddenly this was drowned by the high, piercing scream of a horse in mortal terror. You may have heard it from one caught in a burning stable. This was cut short and there followed such a call of the kill as I could never have imagined possible to come out of any animal's throat.

Starting so low as to be almost unheard, it rose in pitch and volume until it overflowed the valley, echoing and re-echoing

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from the cliffs, beating in the ear drums, and finally, decreasing as slowly as it increased, it died away in a whisper.

For myself, I shrank back paralyzed, unable to shut out the terrible sound had I thought of trying. Bull crouched tense, as he had done the night before, and where the firelight played over his hairy shoulders—he had torn off his shirt while working on the barrier—I saw the hair rise as it does along the neck of a wolf at bay.

WITH the end of the call Bull reached for his club and started for the barrier. Divining his intention, I got into action at the same time, and running forward, I grasped him about the waist, determined to keep him from going to certain death. He unclasped my hands and threw me from him as easily as you could handle a child. He seemed out of his mind and kept repeating:

"It killed him; it killed him."

I grasped my rifle and, having him at a disadvantage as he tried to crawl through the exit, I caught him by the foot and dragged him back to the farthest end of our retreat, and leaping back trained the gun on him as he rose.

"Bull," I said, "I'll shoot if you move. If you go out now you will surely be killed. You cannot kill that beast in the open with a club."

He wavered a moment and then I knew I had lost. The wild light was returning to his eyes.

"Damn you," I yelled, "are you going to leave me alone? Are you going to quit me?"

He hesitated and I saw that what I had said had penetrated his befogged brain; that the light of reason was returning; that I had won. With a sigh he sat down.

I was determined that as soon as it was light we should make our way out of that accursed pit.

"We don't need a big fire now. It won't come back tonight. Get some sleep. I'll watch for a while." Bull spoke as though nothing had happened.

Sleep was far from my mind, but I knew a rest would do me good if I could get it, and so I stretched out on the ground. My last recollection was a hazy picture of Bull, squatting on his haunches, his head on his knees, gazing into the coals.

I must have slept soundly for some hours, for when I sat up I saw it was quite light. Bull had made coffee and prepared a breakfast by boiling a piece of venison from a large steak which, a couple of days before, we had partly grilled to carry with us. The hot coffee tasted good, but the meat was little more than heated through. Bull was always a wretched cook, especially of meats, forever preparing them half-raw. This was one instance when his cooking served more than the purpose of satisfying hunger, for the half raw meat put stamina and strength into us, which proved to be sorely needed before the day was done.

While we were busy eating, the rumble of thunder came to us from the west, and looking up we saw one of those storms which rise so suddenly and rage so fiercely in the mountains, spreading over the sky. Knowing the effect of a tempest upon my companion, I gave up all thought of trying to induce him to leave the valley. The few moments I had left I employed in filling my pockets with shells and seeing that my gun was clean and in perfect working order.

The black clouds, which were just beginning to show on the skyline when we heard the thunder, spread quickly, covering the whole western sky, blotting out the distant mountain tops and darkening the heavens. Bull, at the first warning, looked up, and then seeming to know what he would do when the storm struck, made queer preparations. He stripped to the skin, and taking a knife, cut off the legs of his trousers. Making of them a pair of coarse running trunks he put them back on. Picking up his club, he swung it around his head and threw it out into the open, and with a running leap swarmed up the barrier.

Then I noticed something about him I had never known before. He used his feet to grasp the branches as you and I would use our hands. His feet were prehensile. Truly he was a throw-back. A swing from the first branch and he passed to the butt of a tree where it stuck out over the top; a short run down the trunk, a leap, and he was outside. Running for his club, he took it up and carrying it in one hand at the balance started up the valley at a sort of shuffling trot which he could keep up for miles.

I caught up with him where he had stopped beside a great pool of blood. The tracks of a horse ended here, and the great five-toed tracks of that other inhabitant of this pocket led off toward the opposite cliffs. Letting out a savage curse, Bull whirled the club around his head and swung at an imaginary enemy. Well could

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I understand his preference for this weapon to a rifle at close range. Had the blow landed on the skull of an ox, it would have crushed it in like an eggshell.

Taking the trail, he started on, and though with the swing of his massive sloping shoulders and long arms the gait seemed slow, it was all I could do to keep up with him without exhausting and winding myself.

Blackness now almost covered the sky. Lightning flashed more and more often and the thunder rolled and crashed louder and louder. I could hear Bull muttering to himself and now and again I could catch what I thought was a distinct word, but in a language I had never heard. The intonations were harsh and guttural. He was indeed harking back to a long dead past. I have no doubt that could a student of the ancient Gallic languages have heard all he said, he could have added a fund of knowledge to what little is already known of prehistoric speech.

We had reached the western end of the valley and found that the trail led down a narrow, twisting canyon. Here the walls were so weathered and worn that it seemed dangerous to travel down the narrow defile. Great cracks cut out large blocks, and their very height gave them the appearance of slanting outward. It seemed as though the slightest jar would bring them tumbling down upon us in spite of the fact that they must have stood thus for ages. Just beyond the entrance to this gorge Bull stopped and throwing back his head, sent a long call rolling down the canyon. I have never heard a bull ape roar, but I believe I should recognize it from that challenge of Bull's.

It seemed as though the hush prevailing as the challenge was called out, was the silence of the elements awaiting the signal to break loose, for hardly had the last echo died before the storm broke. The rain came down in torrents, the lightning shot back and forth across the sky continuously and the thunder rolled and boomed, reverberating among the cliffs. Its fierceness seemed to threaten to bring the very mountains down upon us.

BULL was in his fighting glory. Grasping his club in both hands, reckless of what lay beyond, he sprang ahead of me around a turn. As I made the latter I saw that the canyon ended about a hundred yards ahead, and in the face of the intersecting cliff I perceived an entrance to what must have been a series of enormous underground caverns, formed long ago by a faulting of a stratum of rock. Bull was nearly halfway to the opening when, as a flash of lightning more brilliant than the others played across the sky, I saw a movement back of the cave's entrance.

Again the flash—and through the torrents of rain I caught a brief glimpse of that which made the blood run cold within me.

Shuffling toward us at a clumsy rapid trot was the most monstrous creature man, in his wildest nightmares, ever saw. It was impossible to see clearly through the heavy downpour of rain, even in the glaring lightning flashes, but during the few chances I had I received the impression of a great, four-footed, short-legged, hairless, slate colored body, behind a massive head and broad toadlike face; truly a remnant of nature's first experiments with mammals, before, in her ruthlessness toward her failures, she threw aside the great reptiles as rulers of the earth.

Well did I know the futility of trying to pierce that massive skull with a rifle ball.

No rifle made in those days could so much as crack it, let alone enter the brain. Yet before Bull got in the way of my sights I did manage to get in one shot, which if it landed, did not even cause the brute to hesitate.

On he charged in the same shuffling, awkward trot, head down, wide jaws open. Bull had stopped and, in the successive flashes of lightning, I could see him standing in the middle of the trail, feet wide apart, toes gripping the ground, water running from the hairy head and shoulders, the very picture of prehistoric brute man.

A streak of lightning showed the monster almost upon him and he stood unmoved—then darkness. At the same time I caught a further movement back in the mouth of the cave and a succeeding flash showed two more of the monsters coming out.

"My God," I thought, "how many more are there? Can this be our world I am on?

"Am I awake? Who, what, where am I? What chance have I—and poor faithful, storm-racked Bull—what chance has he? How can this all end?"

Another flash and I saw his club raised high and come down with crushing force upon that broad massive head, and again darkness.

How I prayed for another streak of

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lightning. Had the blow stopped the animal, or was Bull crushed to earth and that nightmare monster already towering over me?

In the continuous roll and crash of thunder, ears were useless and it seemed ages before the earth was again lighted. Actually it must have been but seconds, for the next picture showed the animal upon his knees stunned—but poor Bull was underneath and his unnatural position and stillness told me that the fight was over for him.

Not until then did I notice a steady rumble above the tumult of the storm, which, as I listened, grew to a roar. I looked up and in the second of light that followed, it seemed as though a whole mountainside were coming down, rushing upon me.

Some boulder, far up the cliffside, loosened from its insecure perch by the torrents of falling water, had started down, gathering headway and accumulating rocks and trees as it came, until an irresistible avalanche tore down. I turned and ran, stumbling, falling, but always going on.

In the continuous crash of falling cliffs, as they were struck by the avalanche, I expected each moment to be my last, but I must have gone some distance before something struck me on the head and I fell forward on my face, everything turning black.

I do not know how long I lay unconscious but when I finally awoke, the clouds had disappeared and the sun shone warmly.

It all seemed now like an evil dream, yet the lump on my head and the throbbing ache were real enough. I finally arose and turned back. The entrance to the canyon was there, but that was all. The mass of rock and earth, rolling over the edge of the cliffs, had indeed jarred loose those massive blocks of weathered stone and they had crashed down, burying Bull and those great survivors out of the past under thousands of tons of débris and closing the cave with its nightmare inhabitants forever.

* * *

The fire in the grate had burned down to a mass of red coals. I sat silent, knowing that nature, working through the fury of the tempest, had given me a tale which could at no other time, nor in any other way, have been provoked—a tale of her mysterious workings, which would have died untold with my companion. I was thankful.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE

By A. MERRITT

The strangest adventure any man had encountered since Time began faced Leif Langdon when he tumbled through that Alaskan mirage—into a weird, lost world.

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Dare he seek the untamed soul which abode in the lair of the white otter?

The Albino Otter

By Elmer Brown Mason

MY FRIEND, Van Dam, had set out for Miami on one of his mysterious quests, so it was there I sent the telegram, announcing that my painting of Hercules, the extraordinary model for which he furnished me, had taken the first gold medal at the National Academy of Artists. I really didn't expect the telegram to reach him; just sent it in the first burst of buoyancy as a written libation to my good fortune. However, an answer came that very same evening:

You don't say are you going to wear it for a bangle or hang it around your neck at once. Send me here by express ten pounds of round, assorted turquoise blue and light red beads about the size of a small pea and of solid build, and a pound of the purest arsenic railroads toot man felicitations.

Van Dam.

After I had censored the telegraph company's punctuation with an exclamation point after "say," and an interrogation point after "neck," and translated the apparent enthusiasm of the railroads into *"Vraiment, toutes mes félicitations,"* I took up the matter of his commissions.

I never should have been able to get the arsenic had I not happened to mention Van Dam's name in the course of a vehement denial of an intent to poison my neighbors, or at the very least myself. Then, however, the clerk was all interest, and he even directed me to a beadery where I was able to secure the exact articles described. I added of my own volition for good measure some splendidly glittering gold specimens. Despatching the parcel, I returned to the studio and, with the help of three other men, wrote Van Dam the most insulting letter I could compose.

Among other things we asked if the beads were to be his sole costume, and suggested that he swallow the arsenic and feed himself to an innocent alligator for bait. Pretty poor humor, I admit; but I had lost a whole morning of good painting light while making his absurd purchases, and besides, something I had eaten the night before disagreed with me.

At the end of three months I was getting used to the absence of my eccentric friend, when one afternoon the telephone bell rang.

"Hello!" I said in those dulcet tones reserved exclusively for women, millionaire picture buyers, art dealers, and creditors.

"Glad you have regained your temper, artist-man," drawled Van's voice over the wire. "Come and dine with me this evening," and then I distinctly heard an aside that was plainly not meant for my ears: "Lizzie, stop tickling my neck!"

"All right," I agreed, "but you've got to have something to eat that I have at least heard of before."

Van Dam has a way of concocting mysterious dishes that are delightful until you learn of their derivation from some bird, beast, insect, or reptile, quite unknown to the most cosmopolitan menus.

"And shall I dress?" I added as an afterthought.

"Dress! What for?"

"For Lizzie," I answered with sardonic triumph.

Van Dam laughed. "No, don't bother. She won't mind. We'll have a steak, too. Lizzie likes 'em!"

Van Dam's apartments, or diggings, as

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It was white as snow, with eyes of red fire . . . an unearthly, beautiful thing.

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he prefers to call them, occupy the entire top story of an immense building, and are really a museum of the natural-history collections he has made in every corner of the globe. There his Jap received my hat and stick as imperturbably as though I called every day, and ushered me to the curtains of the dining-room. I pulled them aside cautiously and peeked in at my host. Never have I seen a man so sunburnt! He wasn't red, or brown, or bronze. He was black, and this color was heightened by contrast with the whiteness of a small animal (little larger than a cat) on his knee, which regarded me with inscrutable, malicious eyes.

"If that darned thing is a skunk I won't come in!" I threatened. My knowledge of natural history is slight, and anyway, I distrust all Van's pets.

"Skunk nothing!" he answered indignantly; "that's Lizzie, and she's a white raccoon—the only case of albinoism I ever heard of in her family," he added proudly.

"Cost you a thousand dollars!" I ventured sarcastically. Van Dam is shamefully rich, and doesn't in the least mind paying for his whims.

"I bought her for two dollars on the edge of the Everglades, and she is as gentle as a kitten."

"Like all of her sex," I commented, entering and sitting down. "Where have you been, Van, and how did you get such an awful sunburn? I can't say I've missed you, because it's the truth—and that's bad form. But I am curious to know how you combined those many bead things and the arsenic, and what resulted therefrom."

"I have been acting as Cupid in the Everglades," he answered; "but let's dine first, and then I will tell you of hate, love, mystery, gold, and great wild places that will make your city-bounded horizon seem as limited as the inside of a teacup."

VAN DAM'S table is remarkably wonderful. He may, and I have no doubt that he does, live on grass and raw animals during his sojourns in the wilds, but at home his cuisine would quickly make a bon vivant out of an ascetic. The steak was a kind of a glorified dish that quite belied its respectable, bourgeois name, and the things that went with it were indescribably good.

During the entire meal the white raccoon climbed impartially over us and the table, varying its acrobatics by filching choice morsels which it held in its curious, tiny, human hands and, before daintily eating them, washed in a glass of water with all the fervor of a religious rite.

"Well," I said, when my pipe was going comfortably and my host had lit a cigarette, "begin at the beginning. What bleached animal started you this time, and what happened?"

"It was an otter," he acknowledged shamelessly. "I met a globe-trotting Englishman at the Old Club who said a Seminole Indian had told him of a white otter in the Everglades that was supposed to have magic powers and charm fish with its ruby eyes. I found out the Indian's name, Osceola, after a former great chief of the Seminoles. With only that to go by, I set out for Miami, which, as you know, is on the edge of the Everglades.

"Speaking of the Everglades, painter-man, I suppose you visualize them as an enormous, fertile field, sprouting with corn, watermelons, oranges, and coconut-trees, and cut by neat Dutch canals. You probably owe this conception to someone who was trying to sell you stock in the Drainage Improvement Company Limitless, three hundred per cent profits guaranteed. Your idea is not exactly correct.

"The Everglades are an enormous inland lake, fifty miles broad and a hundred and forty long, with a limestone rim ten feet above mean tide level, and a limestone bottom through which seeps, or sometimes bubbles up, fresh water. This limestone is covered with more or less mud, nearly entirely overgrown with sawgrass, and here and there are islands. The water is fresh and pure, seldom over a few feet deep; the mud is from one to ten feet. There are few mosquitoes since the water moves continually in a northeasterly direction, and is, therefore, unsuited to the development of mosquito larvae. Hence there is no malaria.

"Millions of birds and, I regret to say, an equal number of snakes, some deer, and a few Seminole Indians—the oddest of all the animal dwellers—find a home in this strange place. The Indians live on tiny islands in the midst of the Everglades, or in the impenetrable Great Cypress Swamp to the north. Since their verbal contract with General Worth a century ago they have shown no hostility to white men, in spite of all they have suffered. Time has taught them that in their own protection they must not guide a white man into their fastnesses, though they are always willing to lead out those who get lost in this sea of grass, lured on by legends of islands fabulous in fertility,

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overgrown with orange and lemon groves, and even harboring pirate gold.

"You can easily imagine that one Indian name gave me little to go on. It is true that there are less than six hundred Seminoles left; but they are seldom seen, and those I did meet could not or would not give me any information in regard to Osceola, and professed to have never heard of such a thing as a white otter. I tried in every conceivable way to get a guide, all without avail; the best I could do was to find an Indian who agreed to take me to a rookery two days' sail down the coast. Quite frankly I hoped to overcome his scruples during this trip, and by a large bribe prevail upon him to lead me into the very heart of the Everglades.

"A rookery, painter-man, is where one species or several species of birds nest together in communities. The one I sought was of both long and short whites, referring to the lesser and snowy egret, the plumes of which during breeding-time were once worth far more than their weight in gold. Now, thank Heaven, their sale is prohibited, largely due to the splendid work of Dr. A. D. Hornaday, and rookeries, no longer shot up as they were in the old days, show an actual increase in all species.

"My guide was addicted to liquor, a weakness that might have been the means of furnishing me with some information had he not confined his remarks entirely to the Seminole tongue after the fifth drink. He proved, however, a competent man.

"I chartered a small sloop with a crew of two 'conches'—so the local coasting sailors are called—and dropped down the coast. Inside a long key the guide and I embarked in a small, light boat I had brought along for the purpose, rowed to the mouth of a small creek, and commenced our real journey.

"This was not in the Everglades proper, painter-man, but a coastal swamp. The tiny creek we followed was of brackish water and quite deep, though narrow. Sea fish had penetrated far up in search of food, and the waters fairly teemed with marine life of every description. Silvery mullet actually jumped into our boat on three occasions, and we grounded on a great drumfish whose bulk all but blocked the channel.

"There were moccasins galore, and birds beyond counting. It was evidently some time since a boat had passed that way, and the quick-growing vegetation had nearly closed our passage. Constant labor alone with ax and knife cleared our path, so it was only at evening we reached the rookery, too tired to even look for a dry place to sleep. From the boat, while the light lasted, we watched the birds returning to their nests in the cypress trees and mangrove bushes, egrets, blue and green herons, snaky-necked water turkeys. When it was too dark to see, we withdrew a short distance and ate our evening meal. One thing struck me as rather odd: The birds did not seem as tame as might have been expected after a long period of nonmolestation, and were continually hopping nervously to the end of the branches, and even bursting into a snowflake flight that was like the explosion of silver bombs.

"At daybreak we were suddenly startled from sleep. The birds were all gone, and hardly had we realized that it was the report of a gun that had wakened us when our nerves were shattered by two cries of frightful agony. I yanked away the painter that tied us to a cypress tree, seized one oar, the guide the other, and we pulled toward the sound.

"Beyond the trees of the rookery a small island of scrub palmetto came into view, and lying on the edge of the water was an old Indian, a younger man bending over him and hastily tying a cord around his bared leg. As our boat slid onto the mucky land the trunk of a five-foot, diamond-back rattler, its head shot away, was thrashing among the palmetto leaves.

"The younger Indian never looked up from his task; he was now cutting deeply across two fang-marks in the elder's calf, and I noticed his own shoulder visibly swelling.

"Science, painter-man, has provided an antidote even against the supposedly deadly venom of the rattlesnake, and I labored over both men with the anti-venomous serum we owe to Calmette of the Pasteur Institute, and with hypodermic injections of strychnin, and washed the opened wounds with the wine-colored precipitate of permanganate of potash crystals. It soon became evident that the younger Indian would survive—the poison of crotalis seldom proves fatal if the victim is carried through the first hour—but the older man's recovery for a time seemed very doubtful.

"I fought for his life as I have never fought before, and finally the tide turned in his favor. We were then confronted with the problem of getting the patients back to the sloop. Our own boat was too

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small for more than three men, but we unearthed a rude dugout for the younger and towed it behind. It was something of a task, and once it turned over and I had to splash around in six feet of water in close proximity to a shark while rescuing the Indian boy. On the sloop we were able to make them both comfortable and hoisted sail for Miami.

"DURING all this time I hadn't said a word to either of the Seminoles and they had been equally reticent. However, when we were well underway I extracted their story in brief form. Father and son, they had been after sharp-nosed alligators, which is the American crocodile, a sinister, slim, gray-green saurian with black blotches. They had penetrated by an inside channel to the rookery, landed on the scrub-palmetto island, and had slept there that night.

"In the morning the elder man had stepped on the snake, whose rattles had been broken off so it could give no warnning, and had been struck. The younger shot off the head, tripped, fell on it, and the fangs entered his shoulder—proving for the hundredth time that a rattlesnake head will bite even when separated from the body.

"By a fortunate coincidence the son was no other than the Osceola I sought. Money, I had found, was of no avail in providing a guide for my quest, gratitude might—and it did. They said no word of thanks until we reached Miami, and then the old man spoke:

"'My years are many, and it would not have mattered greatly had I died, but my son is young, and life still is sweet to him. You may ask him what you wish; he is your slave till both our debts of life are paid.'

"I know savages, painter-man, and I made no pretense of the ha-ha-it-is-nothing attitude with which so-called civilized people meet even real gratitude, but answered simply: 'I shall ask him much.'

"Osceola seemed to have entirely thrown off the effects of the snake-bite, but his father fared badly. There were signs of gangrene in the wound and his vitality was very low. I thought it best to leave him in a hospital, and he was too weak to make any serious objection. Then I had my interview with Osceola.

"'I am a friend of your people,' I said, 'but they do not trust me. I wish to go into the Everglades to the place where the white otter is, and look upon it. I ask you to guide me.'

"The aboriginal savage, Mr. Painter-Man, may have had a stoical control of his features, but this Seminole Indian certainly did not. Surprise, fear, anger and even horror chased themselves across his face, all to be replaced by a look of bitter resignation.

"'The white otter, *hokatee osana,* the white otter! I wish *chitkolalagochee* (the rattlesnake) had struck my heart,' he answered, 'rather than I should do this—but, alas, my father has spoken for me.'

"I have never felt anything more intense in my whole life than the hate of that tall, young, good-looking Seminole in the days that followed. It simply radiated from him. He made me feel as though I were about to commit some awful desecration, for there was plainly a mystery, the secret of which he believed I shared.

"Nevertheless he made his preparations, and even went so far as to suggest, since it was evidently a law of the Seminoles that no white man should penetrate into their fastnesses, that I stain my skin.

"One early morning found me, dyed from head to foot, paddling up the Miami River, and outlet of the Everglades. We soon turned from the open water, and when the saw-grass finally closed over our heads I doubt very much if many men would have envied me. I was going into a land, or rather into a lake, that had never been really explored, in company with a savage who plainly hated and abhorred me from the bottom of his soul.

"It was hot, hot, hot! The edges of the saw-grass cut at the slightest touch—but before me there was always the thought of the white otter!"

Van's eyes glowed fanatically. I could not help thinking that the Indian was not the only savage on that expedition. Surely there is nothing more ruthless than a scientist once he has a definite object to attain!

The white raccoon, to which I was now quite accustomed, curled up between my neck and the back of the chair. Van's low voice took up the tale.

"That day we paddled from early morning until sunset, sometimes along winding channels which were broad and flowing with clear water, but more often through the cruel, cutting saw-grass that parted in the mere shadow of a trail. Often we dragged the dugout along limestone or mud bottoms, and there was never, the long hours through, one word from my companion. At last, as the birds were flying to their roosts, and their evening chorus mingled with the insistent croak-

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ing of the frogs, we landed on a small island and pulled up our boat. By a lucky shot I neatly decapitated a Florida wild turkey from a live-oak, and elicited the first sound from my mute Seminole, a guttural 'good.'

"I sha'n't easily forget that night. No sooner were the stars out, and my eyes just closing than there sounded from the shores of our islet the bull-like roar of an alligator, to be answered by another saurian in the distance. All night the limpkins yelled—how birds of their size can make such an awful sound is quite beyond me—and the frogs croaked in seventeen different keys, quite unlike any frogs I had ever heard before.

"I slept little, and toward morning, when my eyes had finally closed in the real rest sleep that every outdoors man knows, I woke suddenly to a frightful, nauseous smell. Turning on my side in the direction of the offensive odor, a luminous mass met my eyes. A huge rattler, its scales shining as though with phosphorus, was piled against the body of the Indian, a raised, triangular head, broad as my two hands, weaving nervously back and forth above its coils. At that very moment the dawn broke, Osceola moved, and the reptile whirred warningly.

"'Keep still,' I whispered sharply, and rolled sidewise from my rubber blanket. A shotgun was beneath my hands and I snatched it up, tempted the snake to strike with a stick, and blew it in two pieces just below the neck. It was fully eight feet long, and it shone with foxfire. Unlike any other member of its family I had ever seen, the stripes ran longitudinally.

"Osceola lay tense and motionless, eyes wide open, staring up into mine as I bent over him. Even when I dashed water in his face he came slowly from his trance. To my insistent demands as to whether he had been struck, he simply shook his head and went dazedly about the preparations for breakfast and departure. I noticed that his eyes followed me continually, however, as I was skinning the snake, and their look of implacable hate had been replaced by a dumb, dog-like wonder.

"THAT morning our trail led entirely through the saw-grass with no open channel. It was unbearably hot, and we both labored like galley slaves with paddle and pole. Suddenly Osceola broke into feverish talk, and, with his eyes shifting back and forth from mine to the snake skin I had tacked inside the gunwale of the boat to dry, told me the legends of the All-Soul.

"Long, long ago, even before the time of the great chief Osceola, whose name my young Seminole bore, there was but one soul to all the Indians of the Everglades, so no one did wrong, since the punishment must fall on all. *Ollahaw* (the orange), and *shottaw* (the persimmon), were their sole food, and they dwelt in friendship with every bird, beast, and reptile. Came a great wind with darkness, rain, and thunder, and when it had passed, *holwagus* (badness) was among them.

"To one man he said: 'Why do you eat only *ollahaw* and *shottaw* when the flesh of *woodko* (the raccoon) is so much better?'

"So the man slew *woodko* and ate his flesh, and so great was the power of *holwagus* for evil that the flesh tasted good to the man, and his descendants ever after ate of *woodko*. And some *holwagus* tempted to eat the flesh of *chofee* (the rabbit), others *foakee* (the quail), others *hilolo* (the curlew), until all the Seminoles were corrupted save one alone, a maiden.

"And the All-Soul left the Seminoles, taking refuge in her as the only good left among them. The beasts, in horror, hid themselves, save *lakosee* (the bear), *kowatgochee* (the wildcat), and *katsa* (the panther), and they grew claws and teeth for defense, or even attack.

"Then the Seminoles spoke among themselves, saying: 'Let us kill this maiden who will not eat flesh, and the All-Soul will be shared among us again and we shall be happy.' But *holwagus* heard them and gave poison fangs to *chitkolalagochee* (the rattlesnake), making him a guardian of the maiden, because he did not wish her to be killed and take the All-Soul out of the world, but to become bad like the rest of the Seminoles. Man, bird, and beast feared his fangs. All except *holwagus*.

"But the maiden hid in the bodies of animals, going from one to another, until *holwagus* gave up looking for her and went away. He warned, however, that he would come again and steal the All-Soul.

"Osceola watched me very sharply during the last part of this recital, and then, lowering his eyes before mine, complained of his shoulder. I stripped away the shirt to find it badly swollen, and, for a moment, feared that the fangs of the striped rattler might, after all, have touched him. There was no new wound, however, and I put the swelling down to auto-suggestion till my own theory so worked on my

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imagination that I peeled the snake skin from its place and hid it under my rubber blanket.

"The swelling did not increase, but the fever grew on him until, directing me to steer by a cypress that was the only landmark discernible above the sea of saw-grass, he lay down in the bottom of the dugout and promptly lapsed into delirium.

"I pushed steadily on, far from tranquil in mind. The cypress was only visible above the saw-grass when I balanced perilously on the edge of the rude craft. Suppose I should lose sight of it and Osceola should die? I should be as hopelessly lost as a compassless mariner in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

"However, the cypress began to stand out more clearly, and about two o'clock I was suddenly out of the grass. What a picture was spread before my eyes! First came a hundred yards of open water dotted with the brilliantly colored Everglade ducks and ringed by breaking fish. Then, like a green ribbon heavily embossed in silver and gold, a broad band of water-lilies in full bloom girdled an island—an island that fairly smiled with sunlight, happiness, and peace.

"A grove of lemon and orange trees, pollarded so as to rise little above the level of the saw-grass, had shaded out all undergrowth from the clean, gray soil. To the left spread an orderly vegetable garden behind which crouched a low house weather-beaten to silvery gray and surrounded by a multitude of brilliant flowers. Osceola mustered his strength for one look, rose on his elbow, murmured *poyafitsa* (heaven), and fell back unconscious. I paddled to the shore and pulled up the dugout as a very old Indian came from the house to meet me.

"'He is very sick,' I said, pointing to Osceola; 'we must get him out of the sun immediately.'

"The meaning of the words were plainly unintelligible to the old man, but he understood my gesture. Between us we picked up the fever-stricken boy and carried him to the house, where a couch of fragrant rushes received his burning body.

"For two days, painter-man, I listened to the ravings, half in Seminole, half in English, of that savage, and pity grew and grew in my heart as I fought for his life. The old Indian was a quiet and competent assistant. I was vaguely conscious of another presence in the house, that of a woman, but I was far too busy to even glance at her.

"On the third day the fever broke, thanks to a concoction of herbs the old man brought me which I tried in desperation, and my patient sank into a natural sleep. Wearily making sure that he needed no more attention for the present, I twisted into a blanket, shut my eyes, and immediately fell through unlimited space. While the clock went twice round I slept without waking, save when someone held a cool drink of orange juice to my lips.

"My eyes finally opened to a perfect day. The scent of orange blossoms was in the air and a mocking-bird was trilling from a magnolia outside the window. I looked anxiously over at my patient to find him awake and staring at me.

"'You all right?' I asked.

"'All right,' he grunted morosely.

"'We'll see that white otter soon, then,' I suggested cheerfully.

"For answer he raised his voice and called, 'Ocola! Ocola!' and the old man slipped silently into the room. They spoke rapidly together in the Seminole tongue, and then Ocola disappeared to return in a few moments leading an Indian girl.

"'There is Hokatee Osana, the white otter,' said Osceola, turning his face to the wall with a groan.

"In my whole life I have never looked on so proud a creature! She stood poised like a butterfly ready for instant flight, her eyes blazing at me, full of hate and fear. She was too small and her features too Seminole to be beautiful, but her hair, showing unmistakable traces of white blood in its brown waviness, was very lovely. Her greatest and most wonderful charm was a birdlike alertness, the lightness of thistle-down, a vitality quick as sunshine.

"I gazed at her, my mouth wide open, I fear, and her eyes finally tore away from mine and sought the figure on the couch. With the change that came over her face as she looked on Osceola the whole situation became suddenly clear to me. I understood the Indian youth's hate, his bitter sacrifice in guiding me to his treasure, grasped the significance of the legend, and the reason it had been told.

"'Osceola,' I said sternly, 'it is not a woman with a red skin to whom I asked you to guide me; it is to an otter, a real otter, and white. You have deceived me and your father, whose life, as well as your own, belongs to me.'

"'The animal otter is here,' he answered humbly; 'but it is only a shadow; its soul is in Hokatee Osana, and she is therefore the white otter.'

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"'It is not a soul I seek,' I answered angrily; 'it is a skin, a white skin.'

"The old Indian broke in excitedly with a stream of words.

"Osceola translated.

"'He says, "Lord, if you take the skin of the real otter, Hokatee Osana dies. Will nothing else please you? He offers what all white men desire—for he knows you are a white man.'

"I wanted time to think. Of course I was going to have my white otter, but I have a fundamental objection to offending the religious beliefs of primitive peoples, and, besides, I know there is something in auto-suggestion—the girl *might* die!

"'Show me what gifts you can offer equal to these,' I said scornfully, spilling a pound or two of beads (I received your kindly letter concerning them) on the floor. The girl gave a covetous glance at my offering—she was certainly femininely primitive—the old Indian never even glanced in their direction, but beckoned me to follow him.

"OUT in the sunshine we went through the orange-grove toward the sound of running waters, and Osceola, stopping near the signal cypress, drew back and pointed.

"What has been bred in us for centuries, painter-man, cannot be eliminated in a moment, and I was conscious of a thrill of covetousness at what was spread before my eyes. The ground was strewn with scores of small chests, some entirely rotted away, some partially whole, and from every one cascaded a stream of gold pieces that blinked dully in the sun. Doubloons, pieces of eight, English guineas, French pistoles, strange octagonal slabs of gold from India and the Orient lay untouched beneath the cypress-tree since the day when their last buccaneer owner had abandoned them.

"I stepped closer and with my foot stirred a mass of metal to that silky rustling that weaves a spell through the rooms of Monte Carlo's gambling palace, and gradually the lust of desire left my blood.

"'What is this foolishness?' I shouted angrily, unmindful that the old Seminole could not understand; 'I don't want this trash! Show me the real white otter—hokatee osana, hokatee osana!'

"He included all the scattered chests in a sweep of his arm and then swung his hands, palms upward, to me in a gesture of offering.

"'No, no,' I refused, 'hokatee osana.'

"Again he went through the dumb ceremony of endowing me with all this strangely stored wealth, and again I shook my head and insistently reiterated my request. Suddenly his expression changed from pleading to fury, and snatching a knife from beneath his garments, he flung himself upon me. An old man, it was an easy matter to send the weapon from his hand to the ground, where it fell with the tinkle of metal against metal.

"Unsubdued, he still defied me with his eyes, and our glances locked. 'Hokatee osana,' I demanded fiercely again and

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again, and at last the spirit broke within him. Slowly he turned and I followed his faltering footsteps across a carpet of gold toward the cypress whence came the sound of running water. A stream gushed from the wide-spread roots of the tree, and, as we looked, a white form slipped from beneath and came toward us. It was an otter, painter-man, an otter, white as snow, with two eyes of red fire—an unearthly, beautiful thing, wonderful— Well, look for yourself!"

Van rose, and, switching on more light, stripped away a sheet from a cabinet in the corner of the room.

In the foreground, posed on a tongue of strange gold coins mixed with sand, stood a creature so wonderfully mounted that it seemed alive.

"Van," I cried reproachfully, "you didn't kill that lovely thing! I can understand the slaughter of gorillas and toucans and —animals; but you *could not* have killed that silver spirit!"

"As a matter of fact, I didn't," he confessed. "Perhaps I shouldn't have killed it, and then again it is quite possible that I should," he added honestly. "You see it is a perfect type of albinoism. The matter was taken out of my hands, however. As it came toward the spot where the old Indian and I stood among the rotted chests, it paused every few steps to gaze at me curiously but entirely without fear from its ruby eyes.

"A spit of heaped gold ran down from us and as its feet touched the first coins something sinuous, deadly, fulvous so as to be nearly indistinguishable from the yellow background, lay in its path. There was a sinister buzz as of some great locust, and I sprang forward shouting. The otter turned quicker than light, but the lash of the rattler's head was a lightning flash—and the beautiful thing was dead when I picked it up."

There was a long silence. Van was gazing musingly into the cabinet.

"Are its eyes genuine rubies?" I asked him.

"Only things I could get to match the real ones," he answered.

"Did the Indian girl die?"

"No."

"What happened to you?"

"I came home."

"See here, Van," I exclaimed angrily, "it's all very well for you to escape alone from places it is impossible to escape from, but you have, in a way, taken me along, and I want to know how you did it? What happened to you next? How did it all end?"

Van's eyes were on the white otter and he murmured absent-mindedly before answering me, "*Lutra canadensis vaga, varietas alba.*

"Where was I?" began Van anew. "Oh, yes!

"Well, I skinned the otter and preserved the pelt with the arsenic you were so glad to send me and began to think of getting home. The situation on the island offered an easy solution for anyone with a grain of imagination. The last rattlesnake incident firmly established my disreputable divine origin, and I simply proclaimed my godhead as a reformed and satisfied *holwagus,* and carried matters off with a high hand. My first decree was that Hokatee Osana—the girl—and Osceola should marry, and I performed the ceremony myself."

"What!" I gasped in astonishment. "How did you do it?"

"Oh, Jabberwocky served my purpose perfectly. The line 'and shun the frumious bandersnatch,' particularly impressed 'em. The rest of my beads I bestowed on the bride and gave the bridegroom my shotgun. Then I asked how I was to get back to Miami.

"It was quite evident that I should have to make the trip by myself, because neither of the men would have dared to trust himself alone with me.

"After a great deal of hesitation Osceola finally confided that by keeping the great cypress in line with a tall, yellow pine barely discernible in the distance, I would strike a deep channel which led, though by twice as long a route as we had come, to the Miami River.

"Next day I found this channel, and only just in time to keep from getting hopelessly lost. They must have begun cutting down the cypress the moment I left, for I saw it fall myself from miles away. No human being save a Seminole can ever again find Poyafitsa Island. The rest of my journey was plain sailing, or rather paddling."

I always make some idiotic remark after hearing Van's latest adventure. It invariably leaves my mind in such a hopeless whirl.

"Didn't you get bitten by rattlesnakes, or frogs, or have to eat curlews or—or raccoons?" I asked.

The animal against my shoulder woke suddenly and bit me severely on the back of the neck.

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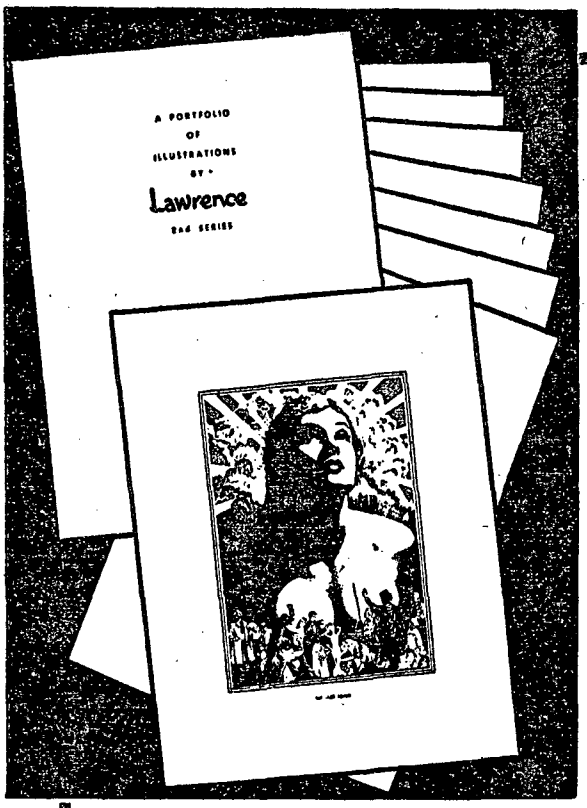

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FANTASY BOOK REVIEWS

By Sam Moskowitz

All books intended for review purposes should be addressed by their publishers to, Fantasy Book Reviews, Fantastic Novels, 210 East 43rd St., New York 17, N. Y.

ACTION VERSUS PHILOSOPHY

TRIPLANETARY by Edward E. Smith. Fantasy Press (P. O. Box 159) Reading, Pa. 287 pages. $3.00.
BEYOND THIS HORIZON by Robert A. Heinlein. Fantasy Press. 242 pages. $3.00.

The two current releases to come from Fantasy Press maintain their previous high standards of printing, binding and illustrating. Both books are physically, neat, well-done, professional jobs.

The famous novel of E. E. Smith's, **Triplanetary,** sub-titled "a tale of cosmic adventure," has been revamped to a considerable extent to fit it into the series featuring Kimball Kinnison (The Lensman Series). When originally written and published it was never intended to be part of that series, and its incorporation is a late idea of the author. In order to successfully carry it through he has written and preceded the original **Triplanetary** novel with 40,000 words of brand-new fiction.

This new section takes the reader from a time somewhere before the creation of our solar system into the future when interplanetary travel has become part of civilization. Two forces—one good, the Arisians, and one evil, the Eddorians, both races of surpassing intelligence and civilization, are present as cosmic chess players, with the earth as one of the pawns. Every important event in history—the destruction of Atlantis, the fall of Rome, the great World Wars involve their machinations.

In this new section, E. E. Smith shows lamentable ineptness at presenting even elementary philosophies of life, and a crudeness in dialogue and love interest. However, in some chapters, such as the one devoted to a battle of Roman gladiators, he displays remarkable versatility, presenting the battle against the background of ancient Rome with considerable skill, ostensibly proving that his forte is fast action and that he should shy clear of romantic and sociological aspects of fantasy fiction. Some of the effectiveness of **Triplanetary** as an action, space story is reduced by the foreknowledge of the reader that every act of the hero and the villain is guided by forces too powerful to resist. Withal, the novel presents a vast enough canvas and skill at fast-driving action of the space variety to ensure its enjoyment by the devotee of that brand of fantasy.

Robert A. Heinlein, to the contrary, is powerful in the very aspects where E. E. Smith is weak. The conversation and so-

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ciological aspects of his novel of the future, **Beyond This Horizon,** accompanied by some philosophical discussions are all pivotal to the success of the novel. These elements are clothed in the intriguing garments of a futureama where men paint their fingernails, still engage in duals, consider the construction of super pin-ball machines as an artistic endeavor, et al.

A good many of the evils of present-day civilization are gone, but man remains eternally dissatisfied, and in this case the story involves a man of the future who must be induced to marry a girl who is a perfect genetical mate for him, since the result will be children of superlative genius. He refuses until he can be convinced that there is a purpose for the existence and continuation of man in the universe.

In his presentation of the differences of tomorrow's world, Robert Heinlein starts off on a note of real entertainment and interest, but it soon becomes evident that he could have made use of some of E. E. Smith's penchant for fast action. But Heinlein has ideas whose speculative concepts are fascinating enough to counterbalance faults of the novel, and a reading of **Beyond This Horizon** is entertaining and at times stimulating.

HUMANIZED MACHINES

WHO GOES THERE? by John W. Campbell, Jr. Shasta Publishers (5525 Blackstone) Chicago, Ill. 230 pages. $3.00.

The stories collected in this volume are of a character unique in the annals of science fiction. They are predominantly science fiction stories dependent upon mood, rather than prophecy, romance, super-science or invention. These tales were immensely popular when originally published under the pseudonym of Don A. Stuart.

Twilight and **Night,** in this collection, personify best the type of science fiction story where mood predominates all. They are tales of the far future, when the earth and the sun are dying, and the superb, efficient machine creations of man continue to function long after there is any need for them. A mood of sympathy for the faithfulness of the machines is created which contrasts vividly with the more common view of the machine as a potential Frankenstein monster.

Who Goes There? the title novelette is a brilliant example of a science fiction detective story, in which the job is to catch an alien creature who can blend into and take control of any human body, while he is still confined in a relatively small area and group, and before he can come in contact with the main body of humanity. In plotting, writing and idea this story is exceptional.

Touchingly portrayed is the scientist in **Blindness** who discovers atomic energy at the cost of his vision, only to find that the world has something better and doesn't particularly want it.

This is a decidedly superior book, both in content and format.

THE AUTHOR OF "THE BLIND SPOT"

THE PEOPLE OF THE COMET by Austin Hall. Griffin Publishing House (8318-Avalon Blvd.), Los Angeles, Cal. 131 pages. $2.00.

The People of the Comet develops to be a strange combination of the super-science story popularized during the thirties and the scientific romance made famous by the old Munsey magazines.

It is the story of Zin of Zar, ruler of the first earth civilization, when earth was so young that only the poles were cool enough to be habitable, who builds a space ship to explore the secret of the comets that sweep through our universe. It is his theory that the earth is but an atom in a macro-universe, and that comets are the cohesive factor holding the atoms into a solid form. He lands on the next large comet, to discover thereupon an old man and his beautiful daughter, originally of a far universe, who have been stranded upon the comet. The old man had developed a formula for expanding out of our universe into the super-cosmos, and upon his subsequent death, Zin of Zar and the young girl follow his previous instructions and expand to such tremendous size that they emerge upon the thumb of a scientist of a super world.

They are examined curiously for a short time, when suddenly they begin shrinking again and reemerge on their comet. In the interim, due to the difference of time rate, millions of years have passed, the comet has

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reapproached earth and the two cosmic adventurers take their old space ship back to earth. They land near the laboratory of a famous earth astronomer, and after overcoming language difficulties, tell their story. Inexplicably they begin shrinking still further, and when last seen were running under the nail of the professor's thumb. Many think the professor odd, but he faithfully keeps vigil on his thumb with a microscope.

Though the romance is of a passé fiction pattern, the startling breadth of Austin Hall's scientific theories, accurate or not, command real respect.

GRIM PROPHECY

FINAL BLACKOUT by L. Ron Hubbard. The Hadley Publishing Co. (51 Empire St.) Providence, R. I. 154 pages. $3.00.

One of science fiction's stronger facets is its ability to warn of things to come. Using a few concrete facts as a base, an author can paint a beautiful or tragic future for mankind, depending upon his outlook. **Final Blackout** is a "warning" science fiction story of remarkable power. The events of the story transpire upon the European continent after another terrible war has laid complete and utter waste to mankind.

L. Ron Hubbard, in his preface, says of **Final Blackout:** "It is just a story. And as the past few years have fortunately proven, it cannot possibly happen." This comment can scarcely comfort us, and indeed smacks of facetiousness when we read the books utterly grim dedication:

"To the Men and Officers with Whom I Served in World War II, First Phase, 1941-1945."

LITERARY SCIENCE FICTION

STRANGE PORTS OF CALL. 20 Masterpieces of Science Fiction, selected by August Derleth. Pelligrini and Cudahy (65 Fifth Ave.), N. Y., N. Y. 393 pages. $3.75.

August Derleth, whose specialty has previously been the weird aspect of the broad field of fantasy has taken a crack at arranging an anthology of science fiction with the emphasis on the "literary" side. If he sometimes slips and allows an occasional tale to enter which is predonderantly weird or fantasy, he generally "errs" in favor of a good story and can be excused with a quick wink at his prejudices.

Outstanding in the collection are such tales as **Master of the Asteroid** by Clark Ashton Smith, in which story a stranded spaceman finds poignant beauty and death-dealing horror on a tiny, vagrant, sky-rock; **Forgotten** by P. Schuyler Miller carries real power, as it tells of an earthman lost and cared for on the desert wastes of Mars by frugal, rabbit-like creatures of that world —of the rescue that comes years later and the emotional problem it presents; **The Worm** by David H. Keller, is a grim tale of a gigantic worm that burrows up from the depths of the earth and of a stubborn man who will not move from his property for the worm or anything else.

Those who like Lovecraft may be pleased to find his short novel, **At the Mountains of Madness,** complete in this volume. Our third reading of this story found it as well-written and tedious as the first. Space would not permit even a thumbnail sketch of the superior contributions of Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. Van Vogt, George Allan England, Nelson S. Bond, Harry Stephen Keeler, Henry Kuttner and many others. The collection is a good one and greatly enhanced by clear type, fine printing, paper and binding.

HISTORY YET UNTOLD

THE TORCH by Jack Bechdolt. Prime Press (Box 2019), Philadelphia, Pa. 229 pages. $2.50.

From the pages of *Argosy* of 1920, The Prime Press has brought to light an almost forgotten novel by an author unfamiliar to fantasy followers.

The civilization of the earth has come tumbling down, the key-stone pulled by the discovery of atomic energy. The world is reduced to near-savagery, but the Statue of Liberty still stands in New York Harbor. It is the legend of this future world that when the torch is rekindled, mankind will again begin his climb back toward the heights he once knew.

The bulk of the tale is composed of fast action spark-plugged by a valiant young man named Fortune and his best girl Mary.

The volume is capably illustrated by L. Robert Tschirky.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Fantastic Novels, New Publications, Inc., 210 East 43rd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers:

You yourselves have noticed the wide divergence of opinion on the stories which are published in *Fantastic Novels*, and on those which are wanted first in the future. My problem is to weigh these opinions and also place in the balance my own ideas on which of the Munsey classics will please the most of the many readers.

So far, judging by your response, a fairly canny estimate has been made. To those of you who have become impatient or disappointed temporarily, I can say these words of cheer and comfort— We have quite a few years ahead in which to bring out these gems, and sooner or later everyone will be gratified with his chosen stories—the remainders of the trilogies and all.

There seems to be an evenly balanced group on each side of the "More Merritt" and "No Merritt" argument. To your editor it appears that a new generation has come up which is very thankful to see some of Mr. Merritt's famous stories for the first time. Well, how about letting them have one once in a while, with new pictures for our own edification?

And speaking of pictures, you will be interested to know that we have some fine ones by Leydenfrost and Paul, to be added occasionally to those of Finlay and Lawrence.

Thank you, once again, with this July issue, for your never failing enthusiasm, your cheery advice and constructive discussions of *our* magazine.

Sincerely,
MARY GNAEDINGER.

COVER A CREDIT TO FINLAY

One dozen Fire Roses to you, dear Miss Editor, for another great issue of F.N.!

The cover was a credit to Finlay. If Virg continues like that, he will make us fickle fen forget all about our cries for a Bok cover.

You sure picked two swell yarns for that there March issue. I will not trouble you with the reasons why they were great, because no doubt my fellow letter writers will furnish enough of them, and I want to make this message as short as possible.

Don't make F.N. or F.F.M. monthly if it would mean lowering the quality of the 'zines one iota. I would rather have them as is.

I see Ed Cox and others want Kline yarns. By all means! I've never read any of his stuff, but I sure would like to.

How about some Cummings and Farley?

How about "The Living Dead" or "Red Hawk" by Burroughs (two magazine stories I saw mentioned in a catalogue and am curious about).

If you are thinking of publishing Merritt's poems (as Capt. Oscar Stroh suggested) why not consider Lovecraft and C. A. Smith?

Best wishes for a bigger and better May F.N.

BILL CALABRESE.

52 Pacific St.,
Stamford, Conn.

ENJOYED "THE GOLDEN BLIGHT"

I simply must say how much I enjoyed "The Golden Blight". This story has a flavor all its own. Of course, all of the few previous things I have read by England (in past issues of F.F.M. and F.N.) were so different.

Frank R. Paul should have been given the task of illustrating "The Golden Blight", perhaps. Such scenes as the furious driving at "fifty miles per hour", in the "magnificent machine" while looking for the strolling John Storm, are the kind of things Paul would have chosen.

In this issue, containing the "Golden Blight", I find four or five letters containing all the various ideas and solutions that I myself had thought out for making it possible to get the classics reprinted sooner. I found this reflected in point "three", in Elliot Franklin's letter. I hope that we will get F.N. monthly, myself, Franklin!

Also, more letters asking for the following are appearing: "Minos of Sardanes" and "Polaris and the Goddess Glorian". I refer to letters by Darrell C. Richardson, Elliot Franklin, and especially, the letter from Donald V. Allgier. These are the kind of letters I like.

"The Toys of Fate", although a good yarn, was enhanced by the superb works of Lawrence. Lawrence is positively perfect. If they only had such artists in the days when the Munsey stories were first printed!

We were notified as far back as the January issue of F.N., that *Super Science* was back. I have not yet seen it on the stands. I am a good friend of Kris Neville, who says in a recent letter that he has a story coming up in it. Naturally, I am anxious to read it. Why has *Super Science* failed to show up?

Finlay's cover for "The Golden Blight", though depicting an irrelevant scene, is still one of the best of the year.

I would like to hear from two friends of mine, both readers, who owe me letters. They are Frank Leask, and Miss Margaret McIntyre.

BOB BARNETT.

1107 Lyon,
Carthage, Mo.

Editor's Note: Super-Science is on the newsstands. You can also subscribe to it.

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"THE BEST THERE IS"

It seems that "The Terrible Three" has been called everything from a masterpiece to downright lousy. I am afraid that my opinion of it falls in the latter category.

I don't think that there will be any such diversion of opinion about "The Golden Blight". I think that it is a masterpiece of poetic justice if nothing else. There certainly is a lot of satisfaction in knowing the fate of England's gold-hoarders. I think that if that is a sample of his work I am going to want to see a whole lot more of it.

Being among the newer generation of fans, I am quite at a loss to know what to ask you to print, but I am of the opinion that 99 percent of it will be well worth reading.

I would like to see more of Taine's work, though. Such things as "Seeds of Life" and "White Lily". I would also like to see more Rider Haggard. How about Hodgson's "Night Land"? There are few fantasy stories as impressive as that story.

I can't think of anything else that I would like to see in F.N., but I know that you will keep on giving us the best that there is to offer.

L. W. McCormick.

920 E. Vine St.,
Kalamazoo, Mich.

WANTS MORE MERRITTALES

My introduction to A. Merritt was via F.N. in "The Ship of Ishtar". This is one of the most enchanting stories that I have ever read. I note that some readers of F.N. state that you have published enough of Merritt's stories, but I disagree for I have never read the "Dwellers in the Mirage" nor the "Face in the Abyss". Again I would like an inclusion of Science Fiction in F.N., for after all, many of the fantastic claims in Science Fiction are present day realities or are about to become so. The stories in both F.F.M. and F.N. I enjoyed most were "Ship of Ishtar", A. Merritt, "The Golden Blight" by G. A. England, "The Purple Sapphire", by J. Taine and the "Undying Monster" by J. Kerruish.

I have heard much of the "Blind Spot" but have never read this story, but would like to. Also, I sure would like to be able to read "Into the Infinite" which was, I believe, published in F.F.M. during the war years. I missed so many of these great stories during those years. I sure would like to see "Drink We Deep" by Zagat, "The Immortals" by Farley and any stories by Harl Vincent and Hal Clement, Flint, Kline, Cummings, Fearn, Francis Stevens. I also would like to see "The Fire Princess" by old master E. Hamilton. With me, it's the story that counts. I consider, was it interesting, did I enjoy it? If I did, then it gave me relaxation, which is the chief function of any story. Keep up the good work.

Russ Brickeel.

P. O. Box 823,
McCloud, Calif.

P.S. Will welcome correspondence and will answer all letters.

TOD ROBBINS ADMIRER

With the March issue, F.N. begins its second year of republication. It also marks the return of one of the oldest—and best—of science-fiction writers—G. A. England, creator of the famous "Darkness and Dawn". However, though I admire this author's work greatly, I must admit to being a bit disappointed in "The Golden Blight". The novel impressed me as not being quite up to England's standard; it failed, somehow, to satisfy.

It began in the usual way: John Storm, like so many other science-fiction heroes, sets out to rid the world of its blackest menace—war. (I suppose I'm being unfair, inasmuch as the story was written so long ago, but this sort of thing must have been old stuff even then.) With the aid of the radiojector, he succeeds in transforming the world's gold into a worthless (?) ash, thereby subjecting the people to, on a minor scale, exactly the same thing he is trying to stamp out. It costs dearly to act the part of peace-maker; is it worth it?

And just what was accomplished? Surely the killing off of the money-lords did not constitute the gaining of his (Storm's) aim? That would merely provide an opportunity for the lesser money-mad big shots to jump into the breach and begin again the greedy cycle.

Although the story ends on an optimistic note, I cannot find the slightest ground for optimism, since, with the annihilation of Murchison & Co., we're right back where we started. But England was content to let his story end that way, and I guess we must be, too.

"The Toys of Fate" is a crackerjack tale. The highest praise I can offer this yarn is to request more of the same; such as "Silent, White and Beautiful", "For Art's Sake", "A Bit of a Banshee", "The Son of Shaemas O'Shea", "Cockrow Inn", "Spurs", and any others by the "incomparable" Tod Robbins.

Also think it would be a fine idea to investigate (and print!) those Merritt poems mentioned by Capt. Stroh in this issue. It would be a great service to the Merritt fans and collectors among us.

James Ellis.

604 10th St., S. W.,
Washington 4, D. C.

COMPLETELY SUITED!

The reason for my writing to you, letter editor of F.N., is that for once you have an issue that completely suits me. Usually, I either like the short story or the novel, but not both. I'm glad to say that "The Golden Blight" turned out to be a very good story despite its rather awful, but fitting, name.

Secondly, I thank you for printing Jim Goldfrank's letter. Upon hearing that he wished to have my address I promptly wrote him and will probably start an enjoyable correspondence. I think that every editor should occasionally grant requests like that. It shows that, despite the rumor, some editors are human.

I hope you will not print any more of Merritt's work for a while. Though I consider his "Seven Footprints to Satan" and "Burn, Witch

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Burn!" the two best STF stories I have ever read, they are about the only works of his which I would call classics.

"The Toys of Fate" was very good except that I just didn't think that it held together in places. The thing probably being that at the time it was written some things were not known that are now known. This didn't stop it from being a very good story, though.

How about printing some of H. P. Lovecraft's four novels? I'd be glad to read them. Or even H. G. Wells.

Until the next time, so long.

PHIL WAGGONER.

2316½ Charleston Ave.,
Mattoon, Ill.

MERRITT DEVOTEE

It has been quite a while since I first read a book of A. Merritt's. I have read six of his masterpieces and always wish that there were six hundred of them. He presents a picture that surpasses all that even I have read. He was truly a great man and when he passed away the world was much poorer indeed. For the 30th time I read "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" and never has such a fascination gripped my heart.

I am deeply grateful that you have printed some of his works and I read and reread these stories until I know them off by heart.

So again I say thank you for giving me an opportunity to read another great masterpiece of an amazing and "fantastic" man.

ROBERT L. COSS.

RD #3,
Bellaire, Ohio.

GLAD TO SEE ARGOSY YARNS

To an old Fantasy and F.N. fan like myself, the strain of waiting from one month to the next for F.N. and F.F.M. is terrific. Now that *Super Science* has reappeared, the strain has eased a little, but in my opinion another magazine is needed to fill in the void. Then, by proper spacing, we could have a new magazine on the stands every week.

Back in my high school days in the 20's (gosh, it seems only last year, even though the calendar does say it is twenty years or more!), I was an *Argosy* bug, and would as soon have missed eating all day as to have missed an issue of "the magazine". I acquired in devious ways about ten years' complete issues, and had them on shelves in my "shack".

Then came college days, and I was away from home and somehow the *Argosies* got away from me. In the excitement of college, getting started to working, courtship, and early married life, they didn't seem important. But with the passing of years I turn my thoughts more often back to the days of my youth. And what I wouldn't give for those *Argosies* now!

So you can imagine my joy when you gave us those old *Argosy* classics, such as "Blind Spot", "Mad Planet", and now comes "Red Dust" in the next issue. There are many of those outstanding stories buried in back files of *Argosy* which will fill us old-timers with unspeakable joy, and would also thrill the younger fans who have never read them, and never can unless you give them to us. How about it, most Esteemed Editor?

I should like to fill up the blank spaces in my files of F.F.M., *Unknown, Unknown Worlds, Astounding* and *Amazing* before 1938. I have two moving picture projectors, hundreds of fine books, many types of magazines, stamps and other articles to swap for them. Who can help me?

Fantastically yours,
AUSTIN WINDSOR.

619 Eligen St.,
Alton, Ill.

NEVER LOSE THOSE ARTISTS!

Fantastic Novels is right down my alley as a magazine. I recently mailed in my subscription renewal for twelve more issues, and I hope to renew the renewal many times.

Thanks for giving us the three Merritt novels. With the new Finlay illustrations, it was almost like reading them for the first time. Don't ever lose Finlay—or Lawrence.

I have seldom read a letter from a fan with which I was in more complete agreement than the one written by Ben Indick in the March F.N. Please keep the stories fantastic. "The Terrible Three" was wonderful in the characterization of Tweedledee and the yarn as a whole was extremely well written, but it was not Fantasy. I have no personal complaint against "Seven Footprints" because, as far as I'm concerned, Merritt could have written a western story and it would still have been a better Fantasy than about forty per cent of the output in the field.

Today, the readers of Fantasy are in a most unfortunate situation. For "original" stuff, we have only one bi-monthly weird magazine. (I am fully aware of the fact that one monthly magazine claims to be publishing Fantasy.) Then we have F.N. and F.F.M,. and after that—nothing. So give us Fantasy only. I could breathe a bit easier on future F.N. policy if I could only forget the appearance of such atrocities as "Unthinkable", "City of the Dead" and "The Lion's Way" in F.F.M.

JAMES C. TIBBETTS.

304 Main St.,
Parkville, Mo.

MARCH COVER WELL DONE

As soon as I saw the name George Allan England in the March issue of F.N., I considered myself prepared for a good story. If the "Golden Blight" was as good as Mr. England's excellent short, "The Thing from Outside", I realized it just hadda be good. It exceeded the "good" by about a hundred kilometers. It was marvelous! The idea was original. The writing was masterful. The illustrations were good. I enjoyed it immensely. But I wish that it hadn't been printed in the March 1949 issue of *Fantastic Novels*.

Look, dear editor, for a long time now, you've been giving us a steady diet of stories about

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people running around, yelling, screaming, beating their brains out against walls, sidewalks, et al, and contributing to the general chaos. I will elucidate.

First, we had "The Second Deluge" by Garrett P. Serviss. This and "Ship of Ishtar" have been the best novels printed so far in F.N. It told of a world in panic because of the Deluge.

Next, in F.F.M. came "Nordenholt's Million" by J. J. Connington. The world was in panic because of the destruction of nitrogen in all plants.

Again, in F.F.M., came "The Scarlet Plague", by Jack London. Everybody was going nuts because of (you guessed it) the Scarlet Plague.

And now we have "The Golden Blight". The world in a frenzy because of the destruction of gold. Give the world a rest, huh? No more land, no nitrogen, no more people (almost) and no gold. Boy, am I glad we're on the silver standard.

"The Toys of Fate" was an excellent story. It was also quite a relief. Instead of the whole world, only one little town was destroyed.

I see that many of your readers gave you the well-known raspberry for publishing "The Terrible Three". Well, ya brung it on yahself.

By the way, the cover of the March ish was very well done. The contours of the face and clothes reminds me of Bok's work! The inside illos were good, especially the one on pages 102-103.

Getting back to the "Golden Blight" for a moment. I wish to congratulate Mr. England on one of the finest story endings I have ever seen. Those last fourteen paragraphs, with the ending.

> "Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
> Ring out the narrowing lust of gold!
> Ring out the thousand wars of old.
> Ring in the thousand years of peace!"

I think I'll always remember that ending. It, you might say, is the direct opposite to the endings of the stories of M. R. James. James had a distressing way of abruptly ending the story with little warning. This is particularly distressing, considering the fine structure of the bulk of his story.

I was disappointed in the absence of the features, such as the book reports, etc. which I enjoyed very much in the last issue. I suppose this was because of the length of the novel and the fact that the second story was a novelette instead of a short. I hope to see a few of these features in the next issue.

Getting down to the mercenary part of my letter, I have the following pocket editions to trade. "The Ship of Ishtar", by A. Merritt, "The Green Man", by Harold M. Sherman, "The Pocket Book of Ghost Stories", an anthology by Philip Van Doren Stern, "Dracula" by Bram Stoker, "Creep, Shadow!" by A. Merritt, "Bar the Doors", an anthology by Alfred Hitchcock, "The Unexpected", an anthology by Bennett Cerf, "The First Men in the Moon", by H. G. Wells, "Terror at Night", an anthology edited by Herbert Williams and "Fear and Trembling", an anthology by Alfred Hitchcock. I am particularly interested in any issues of *Unknown Worlds*, *Weird Tales* before 1930 and No's 1, 2, and 5 of Avon Fantasy Reader.

I would also like to make a couple of even trades. I will trade a copy of "Not Exactly Ghosts", by Sir Andrew Caldecott (with D/W) for a copy of "Unholy Relics", by M. P. Dare (also must have D/W). Also will trade a copy of "The Forbidden Garden", by John Taine (with D/W) for "Genius Lou and Other Stories" by Clark Ashton Smith, (with D/W).

Well, dear Editor, I will (for your sake and that of all the world) sign off for now. Eagerly awaiting "The Eye of Balamok", which I have heard a lot about, in the next issue of ye fine magazine, I remain

Yours FANtastically,
BENNIE JACOPETTI.

1892 Green St.,
San Francisco, Calif.

PREFERS ROBBINS TO ENGLAND

The March 1949 issue was excellent with "Toys of Fate" far ahead of "The Golden Blight" even though G.A.E.'s tale was very good. Tod Robbins is always welcome.

Glad to see "The Red Dust" coming up. I sure wanted to hear about Burl again. How about some of Homer Eon Flint's works soon? Considering that he wrote part of "The Blind Spot" with Hall, he's been sadly overlooked by *Fantastic Novels*. By the way, there must be a few short pieces of Austin Hall that we haven't had yet.

Now the real reason I wanted to put in my two cents' worth is: We fans want an Editor's page, we need one in F.N. and also in F.F.M. Gad, it was one of the most enjoyable features about the old F.F.M. and F.N. Please!

E. WOOD.

31 N. Aberdeen St.,
Chicago 7, Ill.

"THE REAL TOD ROBBINS"

Just a fairly brief affair (hah). I finally got around to buying the March F.N. with "Golden Blight", and want to say that despite the cover, it looks grand. (I was really hoping you'd have Paul illustrate it; he did all F.F.M.'s yarns by England). Despite the indubitable abridgement, the novel looks tops. And having promptly read "The Toys of Fate", I can say here is the Real Tod Robbins! No melodrama, murder or semi-fantasy, but a pure fantasy in the tradition of his masterpiece, "Who Wants a Green Bottle?" Furthermore, it is worthy of classification as a "fantastic mystery" which few of F.F.M.'s adventure stories rate. It is equal to "Wild Wullie, the Waster" and close to "The Whimpus", which was a remarkable yarn indeed.

Keep any and all Tod Robbins stories coming! Lawrence's first drawing for it was excellent, and as close to L.P.D. Fate as one could expect. Robbins certainly has a knack for making the weird and fantastic live! Combined with a writing flair that blends fast pace with leisurely, well-drawn description, his stories are indeed "gems", as you described "Toys of Fate" in its advance notice in 1942. He gets the quality of folk-lore and legend into his story, and with no difficulty. His Hell in the afore-

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mentioned "Green Bottle" is very vivid, and indeed sets one to wondering—and to obtaining the bottles! !

George Allan England, somehow, is left out in discussion of the great fantastic tale writers, because Merritt is so prominent; and yet England's adventures still have an epic swing to them that few other writers for the pulps catch (few writers, that is!). His scene of the desolate, jungle-ridden New York—and the world after a 1000 year sleep is done so capably that one accepts it without hesitation. The adventures are all believable, and if a little sentiment is slipped over, the novel is as fine in 1949 as in 1912 or whenever it was first written. I recently obtained his "Flying Legion" which can qualify as fantastic, and am getting quite a kick out of it. He makes the reader swallow the doggonedest melodrama without flinching!

BEN INDICK.

443 Jersey Ave.,
Elizabeth, N. J.

FINLAY COVER UP TO STANDARD

I have finished reading the March issue of F.N. containing "The Golden Blight".

The plot seemed to me skim milk thin and the theme old-fashioned. In short, I didn't like it. Perhaps I'm in a minority class, but I for one find the so-called old classics, old. Most of them are antiquated in style and plot form and seldom bear more than one reading.

This story has a 1912 copyright date and was written when the U.S. was on the gold standard, and World War One was creeping up. This sermon against the horrors of war, (for it must be regarded as such) was very well put into a fantasy as a means of expressing the author's feelings.

This issue, however, wasn't a complete failure, for it had a story fully worthy of the title "classic". I mean, of course, "The Toys of Fate" a story that can bear consistent reading.

Finlay's cover was up to his admirable standards and the interior illustrations of Lawrence were better than usual.

For the fans who need them, I still have some magazines (all mint and trimmed). There are mostly *Amazings, Fantastics,* and some *Startling.* (Dates 1940-48), Merritt's "Metal Monster" and "Face in the Abyss". (Avon Ed.) Also a few books (mint) some of which are:

"The Survivor"—Denis Parry; "The Branding Needle"—Eugene Sue; "Cursed be the Treasure"—H. B. Drake; "Eric Bright Eyes"—H. R. Haggard; "Numerology and Man and His Lifebelts"—E. T. Bell.

All books and magazines are reasonably priced. Kindly write for list or call at my apartment.

MILTON REICH.

2139 Grand Ave.,
New York 53, N. Y.

TRIBUTE TO A. MERRITT

I have been reading fantastic stories for over four years now, but to tell you the truth, I never have run into an author that could touch this genius for writing such a gripping tale.

Let me honestly say that "Seven Footsteps to Satan" was really a gem of a story. I've run across some stories that to me were good, in fact, very good, but never was one so evenly balanced. Man! that climax was superb, such gripping qualities. Why, I was at work and I was asked to relieve a fellow, but I told him to wait till I finished the story first. And the climax, Yawoh! It's beyond compare. Keep up the good work, A. Merritt, you've reached the top of my list of topnotch writers in Fantasy!

The short story "Amen Ra" was a very good short novel. That's the kind of stories that sell. Keep up the good work, say I, and I'll keep buying your mags.

If there are any fantastic fans that would care to write to this ex G.I., I'd be more than pleased to answer all letters promptly and that's not fantasy. My age, 26. O.K.?

So till I see my letter in your readers page, I'll remain

Fantastically yours,
L. J. MARTIN.
(Jim to my Friends)

27 Morton Pl.,
Augusta, Maine.

ABOUT LEINSTER'S CLASSIC

It is gratifying to read so purely atmospheric a piece as Leinster's "The Mad Planet", which achieves a quality of other-worldliness not completely separated from reality. Stories like this, along with Merritt's and a few others, gave rise to the Munsey legend in fantasy. Few writers of the present era manage to inject the atmosphere of the non-ordinary into their work; Ray Bradbury, in his better moments, and C. L. Moore, are exceptions. They deal mostly in fantasy, while Leinster's novelette was a fine blend of both fantasy and science-fiction. A tale of "The Mad Planet's" calibre makes me wonder if perhaps the "good old days" of fantasy pulp fiction were really a couple of decades ago, as has often been claimed.

Of late there have been some signs of confusion in your letter sections, mostly about Burroughs' titles. Mr. Coriell, in the February F.F.M. informed some people about "The Red Star of Tarzan"; now, in the March F.N. a Mr. Latimer is well-informed on unpublished Burroughs titles with the exception of the novel "Land of Hidden Men". I should like to add to the general confusion: "Land of Hidden Men" was published as "Jungle Girl". Burroughs had a habit of changing titles of magazine serials when they were issued between hard covers.

The other stories mentioned are novelettes; only one, "The Resurrection of Jimber Jaw", appeared in *Argosy.* "Tarzan and the Champion" and "Beyond the Farthest Star" were in *Blue Book* in the issues April, 1940 and January 1942 respectively. "Tarzan and the Jungle Murders" (an atrocious tale, by the way, and as unlike Burroughs as the Weismuller movies), can be found in the June 1940 number of *Thrilling Adventures.* And most fans know that "The Scientist's Revolt" was the lead story for the second issue of *Fantastic Adventures,* July, 1939.

But Charles Miller and others need not

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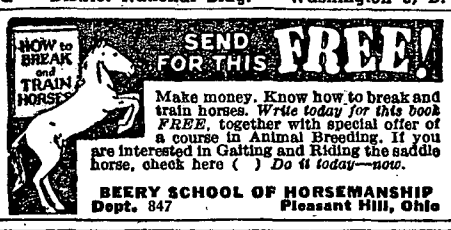
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FANTASTIC NOVELS

despair in their enthusiastic search for unpublished "Tarzan" novels. There is one, serialized in *Argosy* for August 23, August 30 and September 6, 1941. It was entitled "The Quest of Tarzan", which is not to be confused with the published novel "Tarzan's Quest", which was called "Tarzan and the Immortal Men" as a *Blue Book* serial. It is perplexing, isn't it? The *Argosy* "Quest" was illustrated by Virgil Finlay and I do not have copies for sale. It wasn't a very good story anyway, using several old Burroughs gimmicks, but as good as most Burroughs stuff that came out after 1935.

Since there is a new reprint edition of "Tarzan", "Mars" and "Venus" stories available for a dollar, with more scheduled for the future and because practically all of "the old master's" novels can be obtained from fantasy book dealers at more or less reasonable prices, I'd suggest you avoid bringing out any "Mars," "Venus" or "Pellucidar" etc., adventures; only a rare item like "Beyond Thirty", originally a newspaper serial, would be acceptable. As for Kline, for whom I note many demands in the letter column of late, I'd say "no" again. For, while in the Burroughs tradition, Kline's efforts lacked the atmosphere apparent in the early John Carter books. One exception is probably Kline's "Planet of Peril"; otherwise his writings were merely cloak-and-sword antics transported to other worlds.

I'd enjoy more bits like "The Mad Planet", which is an ambiguous request, but anyway, less adventure and more effect, and writing ability like Leinster's.

JOHN BERNARD.

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17151 Oak View Dr.,
Encino, Calif.

OUR COVERS EXCELLENT

I have never written to you before but I feel that I must get this off my chest. Your choice of stories recently instead of improving seems to be deteriorating. For example "The Golden Blight".

This story simply cannot be conceived as of belonging in *Fantastic Novels*. It would be more appropriate in a detective story magazine. Now as to favorable comments. Your covers are excellent and vividly illustrate the story.

I would also like to make an appeal to my fellow readers. I'm interested in getting back numbers. Especially any of the "Polaris Trilogy".

Would like to get some Haggard novels. Would like to get price lists and dates.

LEO LOBEL.
7 Hester St.,
New York 2, N. Y.

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J. U. GIESY FAN

I have been disappointed in the stories with the exception of "Jason, Son of Jason" that you have selected for *Fantastic Novels.*

In the first place, I think you are publishing too many of Merritt's stories. They are all good, but have been reprinted too many times. The kind of novels I like to read, and I think others will agree with me, are the unobtainable ones, for instance, O. A. Kline's "Swordsman of Mars", "Outlaws of Mars", and the balance of the "Polaris Trilogy".

However, thank you for bringing back *Fantastic Novels,* as I finally did get to read "Jason, Son of Jason". I had given up hope of running across it.

Yours for more long novels,

WALTER J. SARGEANT.

3331 De Forest Dr.,
Cincinnati 9, Ohio.

LIKES OUR YARNS

This is my first letter to either F.N. or F.F.M. I am very pleased and surprised by the type of stories published in them. Most of the other magazines are decidedly trashy, but this magazine has excellent stories.

Being a new reader, I would like to get some back issues, if anyone who has such issues is willing to part with them would write. I would appreciate it very much.

I don't feel I'm enough of an expert on Fantasy to offer my opinions of them, so I'll skip that usual part of the letters.

Anyone wishing to correspond with a Fantasy Fan, preferably 16 or 17 years old, if you write to me will be assured of an answer.

JACK PIZZA.

East Meredith, N. Y.

APPEAL TO TRADERS

Although you will never hear anything but favorable comments from me, this is more or less a plea.

Due to a recent fire, I lost both collections of F.F.M. and F.N. Now I have been slowly building both collections back but need a few more prewar issues of both magazines, so I will offer a trade. I have about 25 copies of *Weird Tales* and a few more of assorted fantasy. I will trade for 10 copies of either F.F.M. or F.N. or some of both. I would like to have those before and including 1941. I will gladly defray shipping costs both ways.

JAMES W. MOORE.

Rt. 2, Box 110,
Morganton, N. C.

NICE WORK!

Congratulations on George Allan England and his fine novel "The Golden Blight". Very interesting. Although not on the same superior level as previous fantasy classics, the tale was enjoyable throughout. I particularly liked the

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quotation on page 27 by the character Storm "Whatever contains gold is meat to me." More by this same author very soon in the future.

The front cover and the readers' section was neither bad this issue. Nice work.

I am still bothered by the same question. When is F.N. going to become monthly?

JAMES W. AYERS.

609 First St.,
Attalla, Ala.

PLEASED WITH F.N.

I have just finished reading the March issue of F.N. and found it very enjoyable.

George Allan England's novel of the destruction of world finance, although not brilliant, was excellent reading and made good sense in its philosophy. There was, through the entire plot, a note of irony, since it was published in 1912—two years before World War I.

The idea of all the world's gold disappearing is novel and was expertly handled in G. A. England's "The Golden Blight". I must say, the story certainly appealed to me, but I confess, it was not fantastic enough to suit my tastes. Also the story was a trifle old—but please, don't misunderstand me—I earnestly hope that you have more such stories as this in the near future.

Concerning "The Toys of Fate"—this is undoubtedly a small masterpiece—it was written well and above all, a brilliant plot. There's not much else to say on the matter—except—bravo, Tod Robbins.

Changing the subject, I wish you would reprint some of the more modern stories—I'm sure there are some good ones.

These are some of the stories that I would like to see in F.N. or F.F.M. in the future:

"Out of the Silent Planet" by C. S. Lewis; "The Shadowy Thing," by H. B. Drake; "The Wonder Stick" by Stanton A. Coblentz; "Sinister Barrier" by Eric Frank Russell; "Vengeance of Gwa" by S. Fowler Wright; "The Silver Peril" by Maryse Rutledge.

In closing I can say that I would appreciate any story of Algernon Blackwood, Ray Bradbury, or H. P. Lovecraft.

Fantastically Yours,
BING CLARK.

FOR SALE OR TRADE

I am one of your fans, silent ones, that is, having read all Science Fiction magazines of all kinds for the last 17 years. However, I am a very poor writer so have never written before. This, though, seems the time to let down my hair and try to get a letter in somewhere. You see, I have quite a few magazines I would like to sell or trade, due to the fact that we work for construction and seem to keep on the move about twice a year, so . . . right now I have so many and I can't keep moving them around with me, do not wish to destroy them so am in the greatest of hopes that you will help me out and publish this letter.

Anyone who is interested, send me a request

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WHAT DO YOU THINK?

for my list, together with a stamped envelope for a reply.

MRS. JESSIE LINEBARGER.

General Delivery,
Kingman, Ariz.

P.S. I really enjoy your magazines and intend to keep reading all of them I can get. Keep up the good work. Jessie.

NO COMPLAINTS

I've got no complaints to make. You get my quarters regularly.

How about reviving *Astonishing* now that S.S.S. is back? As soon as I get a couple of F.F.M.'s I'll have a complete set of all your mags.

When do we get "Green Fire"? Seems it was requested in '40 and still no results. Well, o.k., you're doing better. Now for a notice I'd like to see in a early issue. I've got hundreds of mags to trade for early F.F.M., F.N., *Weird* before '40, *Unknown*, and A.S.F. '44 and '45.

Please send a want list, and I'll answer all letters.

HOWARD DEVORE.

16536 Evanston,
Detroit 24, Mich.

WANTS H. E. FLINT

I hope this letter will see print as I have a few books which I wish to sell: E. E. Smith's "Skylark Three", "Triplanetary", and "Skylark of Valeron"; E. R. Burroughs' "The Mucker"; "A Treasury of Science Fiction", edited by Groff Conklin; S. F. Wright's "Deluge"; A. E. van Vogt's "Slan"; etc. Anyone interested, please write.

One thing more, dear editor: you are doing an injustice to readers of science fiction in not publishing Homer Eon Flint's "The Planeteer", "The Queen of Life", "The Man in the Moon", "The Devolutionist", and "The Emancipatrix".

RICHARD A. MCLELLAN.

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Both *Fantastic Novels* and *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* are superb magazines. No other fantasy magazines are even close. I especially like the idea of the book reviews. I find your magazines the most difficult to obtain at the newsstands. I have to rush or they are sold.

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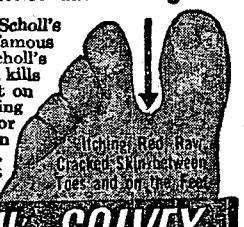

Dr. Scholl's SOLVEX

FANTASTIC NOVELS

NEEDS ASSISTANCE

I have just finished reading "What Do You Think?" and I'll tell you what I think. I think that A. Merritt's stories are superb. I have read "Burn, Witch, Burn!", "Creep, Shadow!", "The Moon Pool", "Conquest of the Moon Pool", "Ship of Ishtar" and some of his short stories. Can anyone tell me about others?

But to get down to the real reason for my writing this letter. Some time ago I set out to read a story entitled "Children of the Lens" by E. E. Smith. At the time it was being published in a magazine entitled *Astounding Science Fiction*. It started as a serial in the November 1947 issue and was to be continued for four issues. I was really enjoying the story body and soul when the greatest tragedy in my life occurred. The only newsstand that the town in which I live has got, discontinued the purchase of aforesaid magazine. Can someone bring me out of the darkness of interstellar space by sending me a copy of the last part or by telling me where I may acquire one? Please!

I also wish to state a fact which everyone knows, or should by this time, that F.N. is one of the best scientifiction magazines.

I am a lonely teen-ager stuck in a small town. Can anyone take time out to write to me?

WAYNE EMMONS.

Bristol, Vermont.

CAN YOU INFORM HER?

Believe it or not, this is the first fan letter I have ever written to a magazine. But after twelve years of reading Fantasy and Science Fiction (I began at the tender age of ten) I think it is time that I began thanking someone for so many years of enjoyment.

Now I would like a little information. I am trying to find out if A. Merritt's stories were ever published in hard cover form. I would like to have a full collection of his writings.

MILLICENT L. HALL.

2755 W. Jackson Blvd.,
Chicago 12, Ill.

SWAP OFFER

Well, well, so we've added a book review dept. to F.N., I see. That should go over well both with readers, who will thus learn of books that they might otherwise have missed, and with the publishers of those books.

Glad to see a George Allan England yarn.

I have quite a number of back issues of fantasy and science-fiction magazines to trade, some dating back to 1926, plus quite a few books.

RICHARD H. JAMISON.

8600 Mathilda Ave.,
St. Louis 23, Mo.

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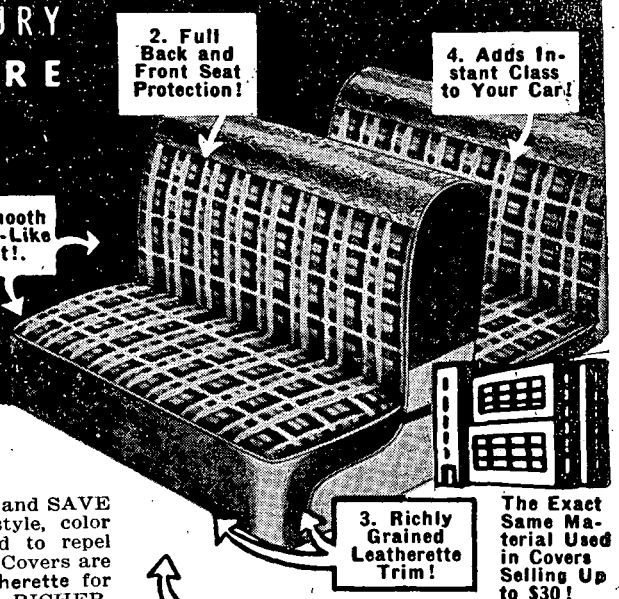
PAY LESS—GET THE BEST! SENSATIONAL FACTORY-TO-YOU SAVINGS AT DIRECT-FROM-FACTORY PRICES

LATEST STYLE LUXURY GENUINE FIBRE

SEAT COVERS

AT WAY BELOW FACTORY PRICES


2. Full Back and Front Seat Protection!
4. Adds Instant Class to Your Car!
1. Smooth Glove-Like Fit!.
3. Richly Grained Leatherette Trim!

Same Superb Quality As Covers Selling At Over 3 Times These Bargain Prices! Buy direct and SAVE TREMENDOUSLY on smartest, new style, color glamorous seat covers! Lacquer-coated to repel water, ART-CRAFT Genuine Fibre Seat Covers are double-stitched, trimmed with rich leatherette for extra long, luxury wear! Expertly tailored, RICHER, STRONGER, Revolutionary—New ELASTICIZED SLIP-OVER SIDES assure FAULTLESS FIT . . . NO INSTALLATION COST! All in stunning Scotch Plaids of soft, harmonious multi-color weaves! Make old cars look like new . . . new cars even more elegant!

The Exact Same Material Used in Covers Selling Up to $30!

5. MONEY SAVING! STURDY!

SMARTEST SCOTCH PLAIDS

YOUR CHOICE OF 23 SPARKLING COLORS!

Only $3.98 For Coupe or Front Seat!

Only $7.95 Complete Set of Covers for Sedan or Coupe!

EASILY INSTALLED — TAKES A FEW MINUTES!
(on all make cars)

Specify style for YOUR car.

TYPE A — Solid back for 4-door sedan...front or rear. Rear for coach or coupe.
TYPE B — Divided back, solid seat for front coupe or coach.
TYPE C — Individual seats or bucket type for divided back and seat.

WHATEVER YOUR CAR HERE ARE YOUR COVERS!

Guaranteed perfect fit for every popular make and model, old or new, including—

BUICK	LaSALLE
CADILLAC	LINCOLN
CHEVROLET	MERCURY
CHRYSLER	NASH
DeSOTO	OLDSMOBILE
DODGE	PACKARD
FORD	PLYMOUTH
FRAZER	PONTIAC
HUDSON	STUDEBAKER
KAISER	TERRAPLANE
LAFAYETTE	WILLYS

And Many Others

SENT ON APPROVAL

BUY AT DIRECT FACTORY-TO-YOU PRICES. ACT NOW Satisfaction Guaranteed or 5 Day Money-Back TEST AT OUR RISK.

MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE with 5-Day FREE Trial

SENT ON APPROVAL! SEND NO MONEY!

ART-CRAFT CO., Dept. 27
1025 Broad St., Newark 2, N. J.

Gentlemen: Kindly rush ART-CRAFT Seat Covers on special 5-day Money-Back Inspection Offer.
Color..... 2nd Color.....

- ☐ Full set front & back covers $7.95. My car is a 19... Make.....
- ☐ Front seat cover only, $3.98. ☐ 2-door ☐ 4-door
- ☐ Back seat cover only, $3.98 ☐ Type A ☐ Type B ☐ Type C
- ☐ On delivery I'll pay postman purchase price plus few cents postage and C.O.D. charges.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....Zone....State.....

(PLEASE PRINT)

☐ $.....purchase price enclosed. You pay postage.

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Mason's New ZIPPER Shoe

Skyrockets your SALES and PROFITS!

Customers everywhere eager to buy these unique "Zip-On . . . Zip-Off" shoes RIGHT NOW!
Top quality glove-soft leather . . . Mason craftsmanship . . . astonishing Zipper shoes lead record-breaking Mason line of over 200 superb styles of dress, work, sport shoes for men and women, with Leather Jackets, Raincoats, and other fast-selling items. A line that maintains Mason's 45-year reputation for LEADERSHIP.

POWERFUL NATIONAL ADVERTISING

Powerful National Advertising in SATURDAY EVENING POST, LIFE, GOOD HOUSEKEEPING . . . scores of other powerful National Magazines . . . paves the way for you.

SALES POTENTIAL TRIPLED

Cash in NOW. Help the people in your territory get highest quality, most comfortable exclusive Feature footwear they can ever buy for the money. Give them exclusive Personal Fitting Service and help yourself to a sweet, steady, ever-growing income!

GET SAMPLE OUTFIT *FREE!*

Sell the great Mason ZIPPER Shoe and hundreds of other newest styles and models! Get Big FREE Sample Outfit! Be first in your territory!

SELL MASON'S GENUINE RUBBER RAINCOATS

Sell fast. Big profits for you! Guaranteed waterproof in heaviest rainstorms . . . thousands of customers all around you.

MASON'S LEATHER JACKETS

Keep profits rolling in with these soft, pliable, yet tough and warm, long-wearing Leather Jackets of specially dressed hides. **Low Price** — amazingly liberal commissions for you!

MASON'S MANY ADVANTAGES!

150,000 Pairs of Shoes!

You draw on our stock of 150,000 pairs of fine shoes in over 150 different styles *plus* immense daily factory-output. What a selection . . . *exact* size and width with perfect fit in the wanted style and color . . . *every* time! More shoes than your customers could find in many stores combined!

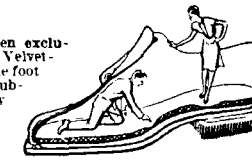
EVERY MASON SALESMAN AN EXPERT SHOE FITTER

Learn to fit every customer through Mason simple, accurate, easy-to-learn methods. Mason TRAINS YOU and makes you a Foot Expert and Certified Shoe Fitter. Mason helps you build a Big Money-Making, Permanent, Repeat Shoe Business!

DON'T DELAY—MAIL TODAY

MEN AND WOMEN WELCOME COMFORT OF *Air Cushioned Velvet-Eez Shoes*

Show men and women exclusive Air-Cushioned Velvet-Eez shoes that cradle foot on 10,000 tiny air bubbles! Many report they sell on six out of every ten calls!



CLIP and MAIL COUPON NOW!

MASON SHOE MFG. CO.
Dept. M-358, Chippewa Falls, Wis.

RUSH me your great New Free Sample Outfit. Include your Automatic Selling Plan and send the book 5,000 Salesmen wrote for me. I want to become a Foot Expert and Certified Shoe Expert . . . and start making big money fast. Send everything FREE and Prepaid.

(My own shoe size is.....)
Name .....
Address .....
Town..... State.....

MASON SHOE MANUFACTURING CO.
Dept. M-358 Chippewa Falls, Wis.

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